

Awqaf ministry announces special prayers for King Hussein

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced Wednesday that special prayers will be performed on Friday, Feb. 12, for the soul of the late King Hussein Ben Talal at all mosques in the Kingdom. The announcement said the special services will be conducted upon the conclusion of the usual Friday prayers.

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Saddam presents condolences to Jordan embassy

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Wednesday presented his condolences to Jordan's embassy in Baghdad for the death of King Hussein through a representative. "The director of the president's office came to the embassy to present his condolences in the name of President Saddam Hussein," an embassy spokesman told AFP. Hundreds of Iraqis and Arabs resident in Iraq, as well as members of the capital's diplomatic corps, descended on the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad to sign their names in the condolence book.

Syrian FM upbeat about improving bilateral ties

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al Sharaa was upbeat Wednesday about future relations with Jordan, after the visit to Amman by President Hafez Assad and his talks with His Majesty King Abdullah. "We feel a page has indeed been turned and that the way is now open for an improvement in relations with our brothers in Jordan," he told journalists. He described Jordan as a "fraternal country" and said the meeting between Assad and King Abdullah on the sidelines of the funeral of King Hussein was "fruitful and friendly."

Thieves break into Barak's car

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Unknown thieves smashed the window of Labour Party leader Ehud Barak's car in Tel Aviv on Wednesday and stole a number of documents relating to his electoral campaign, police sources said. "We view this incident as a very serious matter," a police official told AFP. "The thieves stole documents containing information about Barak's platform and copies of his speeches," the official added. The police took finger prints off the car and have launched an investigation into the incident.

Israeli who spied for Soviets released

TEL AVIV (R) — Israel decided on Wednesday to free from jail a reserve colonel who spied for the Soviet Union in the 1980s after he served eight years of a 12-year sentence, an official said. A prison authority spokeswoman said a parole board reduced the sentence of Shimon Levinson-Lavi by one-third and he would go free on Wednesday. Levinson-Lavi was arrested in 1991 and convicted later of passing secrets to the Soviet Union, high treason and other security offences. Israel Radio said he worked as a security officer in the prime minister's office when he committed the crimes. "He gave the KGB secret documents revealing Israel's intelligence alignment and secret telegrams from the prime minister's office and he revealed to the Soviets the identities of top members of the intelligence community," the radio said.

Israeli wounded in Gaza bomb blast

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — An Israeli civilian was slightly wounded in the Palestinian-controlled Gaza Strip overnight when a remote-controlled bomb was set off as his car passed, the Israeli military said Wednesday. The bomb went off on a road between the Jewish settlement of Nezzarim, near Gaza City, and the border with Israel at Karni. The civilian, whose car was being escorted by Israeli troops, was taken to hospital in Jerusalem.

King receives condolences from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday received a cable from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia expressing sympathy on the passing of King Hussein and wishing King Abdullah success in leading the Jordanian people.

"We received the news about the passing of King Hussein with deep grief as we have lost a dear brother, and I would like to express my sympathy and condolences and that of Saudi Arabia to you, the Hashemite family and the Jordanian people," King Fahd said.

He added: "We hope Your Majesty will — with God's help — follow in the footsteps of your late father under the present circumstances and challenges which confront our nation. Saudi Arabia reaffirms its deep-rooted brotherly links with Jordan and prays to God that He may bless King Hussein's soul and help you to serve your country and the Arab and Islamic nations."

In another cable, King Abdullah received condolences from Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz, the Saudi

crown prince, deputy prime minister and commander of the National Guard.

Paying tribute to King Hussein, Crown Prince Abdullah said: "The late King, with his political wisdom, has placed signs on the road to guide you so that there will be no change in the strong, brotherly ties between us. We reassure you that we will stand by you and by the Jordanian people in good times as well as bad."

"King Hussein was not a mere passer-by in this world, he entered history books not only representing his people and his family but the Arab Nation, with the legacy he has left behind him after 47 years of rule," Prince Abdullah added.

Recalling his visit to the Mayo Clinic last year while the late King was being treated for cancer, Prince Abdullah said "the late King left a deep impression on me and will leave a deep impression on the people of Saudi Arabia."

Prince Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz and Prince Faisal Ben Fahd Ben Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia sent cables to King Abdullah expressing deep sor-

row over the loss of King Hussein. They wished King Abdullah much success in the leadership of the Jordanian people.

King Abdullah also received a cable of sympathy from the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifah Al Thani. Sheikh Hamad said he shares with Jordan its grief and sorrow over the loss of "the statesman of peace."

The emir reaffirmed his country's full support for strong brotherly relations between Qatar and Jordan.

He also sent a cable to HRH Crown Prince Hamzah, offering his sympathies and wishing the Prince and the Jordanian people progress and prosperity.

Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi Wednesday called King Abdullah by telephone to express his condolences, paying tribute to the late King Hussein's efforts in uniting Arab ranks and serving the causes of the Arab and Muslim nations.

Also Wednesday, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh held a telephone conversation with King Abdullah during

which they exchanged views about issues of common concern to Yemen and Jordan. Saleh voiced his country's full support for Jordan on various fronts.

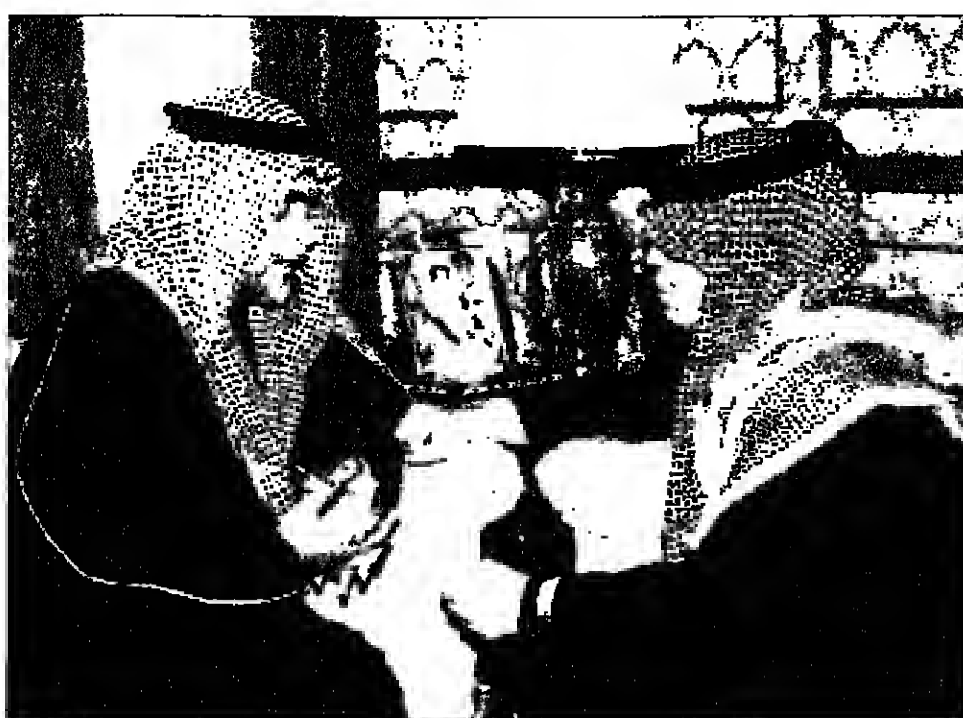
In another cable, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan told King Abdullah that he was looking forward to working with him, adding that Jordan plays a vital role in the Middle East region and as a member of the United Nations.

In Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's cable to the King on Wednesday, the premier said, "I am quite confident that Jordan, under your leadership, will enter a new era of peace and prosperity."

The Chilean government expressed the Chilean people's deep grief and sorrow in a letter to the Royal Court.

Chile wished King Abdullah success in his efforts to achieve a just peace and stability in the Middle East.

Also Wednesday, King Abdullah received a cable of condolences from the president of Vietnam in which he wished Jordan continued success and prosperity.



His Majesty King Abdullah meets Wednesday with Prince Bandar Ben Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the U.S., who offered condolences to the King on the passing of King Hussein (Photo by Yousef Allan)

King receives condolences from Saudi envoy to U.S.

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday received Prince Bandar Ben Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the U.S., who was accompanied by Prince Faisal Ben Turki.

The two princes offered their condolences to the King on the passing of King Hussein and wished him success in the leadership of the Jordanian people.

Upon arrival in Amman, Prince Bandar said: "We, your brothers in Saudi Arabia, feel that we have lost a great leader who was great in life and in death, attracting the world's dignitaries who attended his funeral in recognition of his principles."

"To me, personally, I feel I lost a father, a friend and a leader. I consider myself a brother to the late King's sons," Prince Bandar said.

"We have great hope that King Abdullah will follow in the footsteps of his father," he said, adding that relations between his country and Jordan will remain strong and solid and will last forever.

Also Wednesday, King Abdullah received the president of Djibouti, Haj Hassan Goultid, who offered his condolences and those of his people.

Goultid said the passing of King Hussein was a great loss for the Arab and Islamic nations.

King Abdullah was also consoled by former Lebanese Presidents Elias Hrawi and Amin Gemayel and former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The Lebanese dignitaries wished the King success in the leadership of the Jordanian people towards further progress and prosperity.

King Abdullah also received Lebanese Prime Minister Salim Hoss, who voiced the grief of the Lebanese government and people.

Upon their arrival in Amman earlier, they paid tribute to King Hussein's endeavours to promote pan-Arab national interests.

King Abdullah also received Sheikh Tameem, the son of Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifah Al Thani, the

emir of Qatar. In offering condolences from the leader, people and government of Qatar, Sheikh Tameem wished the King success in his leadership of Jordan.

Arriving in Amman Wednesday, Sheikhha Moza Bint Nasser, wife of the emir of Qatar, headed a women's delegation to offer condolences to the Royal family.

Also Wednesday, Her Majesty Queen Noor received condolences from Prince Bandar Ben Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz, Sheikhha Moza Bint Nasser, Intisar Al Wazir, wife of the late Khalil Al Wazir (Abu Jihad), Rasha Al Sabah, and Hrawi and his wife.

Also receiving condolences were Their Royal Highnesses Princess Basma Bint Talal, Princess Rania Abdullah, Princess Taghrid Mobammad, Princess Sarvath Al Hassan, Princess Alia, Princess Zein, Princess Aisha, Princess Haya, Princess Inan and Princess Raya, and other members of the Royal family.

Israel releases longest-held Arab prisoner

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel released on Wednesday its longest-held Arab prisoner, an Egyptian national arrested in 1977 for attacking Israeli forces in the Sinai.

Mahmud Sawarka, 69, was taken from a prison near the southern city of Ashkelon and handed over to Egyptian authorities at the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip into Egypt, a spokesman at the prison authority told AFP.

His release was ordered by President Ezer Weizman as part of a wider review of the cases of Arabs and Arab Israelis held in Israeli jails, officials said.

Sawarka was the longest-held Arab prisoner in Israeli jails, the spokesman said.

He was sentenced to 45 years in prison for throwing a grenade at Israeli forces occupying the Sinai, killing one sol-

dier. Israel withdrew from the Sinai under a 1979 peace treaty with Egypt.

According to relatives in Egypt, Sawarka has been suffering from stomach ailments and eye problems. During his first year in prison, his wife gave birth to a baby girl, Samira, who he was allowed to meet for the first time in 1997 when she was 19.

Israeli press reports in the past have linked the eventual release of Sawarka or some of around a dozen other Egyptians held by Israel to the release by Egypt of Azzam Azzam, an Israeli Druze sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1997 on charges of spying for Israel.

Israel denies Azzam is a spy and Weizman discussed his case in September with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Alexandria, although

Mubarak in December rejected calls for the Israeli's early release.

Weizman and Mubarak both attended King Hussein's funeral in Amman on Monday, but it was not known if they met or discussed the prisoner exchange issue.

In addition to the Egyptians, Israel is currently believed to be holding 52 Lebanese prisoners, 22 Syrians, 21 Jordanians, seven Iraqis, three Iranians, two Kuwaitis and a Libyan, in addition to about 3,000 Palestinians and several dozen Israeli Arabs detained for security offences.

Weizman last month commuted life prison terms of four Israeli-Arab prisoners charged with killing Israelis to shorter sentences and pardoned a fifth as part of a broader review of the files of Arab prisoners in Israeli jails.

His office said he is currently studying at least 20 other cases of Arab security prisoners.

Last week Weizman also shortened the sentences of eight Jews held for killing or wounding Arabs.

Israeli press reports said Weizman wanted to release or cut the sentences of more Arab prisoners as part of an effort to ease tensions between Israel and the Palestinians over implementation of the Wye River peace accord.

Under the land-for-security deal signed in October, Israel agreed to release 750 Palestinian prisoners.

But when the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu freed a first batch of 250 in November, only 100 were political detainees and the rest common criminals.

U.S. aircraft attack two sites in southern Iraq Iraqi civilian killed, several wounded in air attack, INA says

Agencies

FOR THE first time in a week, American aircraft fired at two air defence sites in Iraq Wednesday after three waves of Iraqi fighter jets violated the southern "no-fly" zone, U.S. military officials said.

No activity was reported over the northern zone, although patrols also were conducted there.

The incidents occurred near Talil, about 270 kilometres southeast of Baghdad, and near Al Najaf, about 160 kilometres south of Baghdad, between 0730 GMT and 930 GMT, said

U.S. Central Command

An Iraqi civilian was killed and several others were wounded when "enemy planes" bombed an Iraqi air defence installation in the southern no-fly zone, the Iraqi news agency (INA) said.

The agency quoted an Iraqi military spokesman as saying that "several enemy formations" flying out of Turkey, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had violated Iraqi air-space.

"The criminal enemy bombing cost the martyrdom of a civilian in the town of Najaf where several others were wounded," he said.

All coalition aircraft returned safely to their air bases, the Pentagon said. U.S. officials didn't immediately identify the planes or report how many were involved, although F-15 and F-16 fighter jets and Marine EA-6B Prowler aircraft frequently patrol the region.

In three separate incidents, a pair of Russian-made MiG-23 or MiG-25 jets entered the no-fly zone, where U.S. and British patrols have barred Iraqi military flights since after the 1991 Gulf War to protect rebel groups from Saddam Hussein's forces. U.S. officials

said.

The Iraqi planes immediately turned tail when confronted, the officials said.

"They were involved in this pattern of cheat and retreat," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Ernest Duplessis, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command in Florida. "It was a provocation."

The U.S. pilots weren't targeted by the Iraqi jets or by the anti-aircraft missile sites, but struck against the air defence systems as a self-defensive measure, Duplessis said.

"There was no [radar] illumination, but anytime we have a violation of the no-fly zone,

that is a threat," Duplessis said. "And so the air defence sites were struck."

The U.S. warplanes struck six Iraqi targets, including surface-to-air-missile batteries and associated command and control systems, according to Duplessis, who said a damage assessment was still under way to determine if the sites were destroyed.

Tensions have been high in the region since the United States and Britain, which share patrol duties over the region, unleashed air strikes in December on Iraqi military and communication sites.

Iraq's Aziz to visit Turkey on Monday

ANKARA (AFP) — Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz will make one-day working visit to Turkey on Monday, the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement Wednesday.

The visit will focus on the Iraqi crisis and bilateral ties between Ankara and Baghdad, the ministry said.

The official Iraqi news agency INA said Aziz would hold talks on "common interests" with Turkish officials.

The statement did not give Aziz's itinerary, but said he would hold some high-level meetings.

A Turkish diplomatic source said the Iraqi deputy premier was expected to meet Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit and possibly President Suleyman Demirel.

The visit comes during a period of tension between the two states, over Turkey allowing U.S. and British planes to use its territory as a base for patrol operations in Iraq's northern no-fly zone.

The no-fly zones, imposed after the 1991 Gulf War to protect Iraq's Kurdish and Shiite minorities, extend north of the 36th Parallel and up to the 33rd Parallel in the south, reaching the outskirts of Baghdad.

Several clashes have erupted between the Western allies' aircraft and Iraqi ground troops and jets in the exclusion zones since the end of the Desert Fox war last December.

Ecevit has voiced concern about U.S. policies towards Ankara's southern neighbour Iraq, particularly over the increasing number of clashes in the northern no-fly zone.

"What will these result in? It is not possible to invade a country through air strikes... But a ground operation would cause the U.S. and the region problems," he said.

Turkey supported the U.S.-led multinational coalition during the Gulf War, allowing U.S. planes based in southern Turkey to participate in bombing raids on Iraq.

But Ankara has since complained of a loss of some \$35 billion due to the trade embargo on Baghdad.

Aziz had previously visited Turkey in June 1991 and November 1996.

Arafat 'studying' postponement of Palestinian state

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat hinted Wednesday that he could delay a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood in May, a step Israel has warned would lead it to annex occupied territory.

Speaking to reporters after talks here with Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Elio di Rupo, Arafat said he would consult with governments which sponsored the Oslo peace accords with Israel before deciding on the timing of an eventual statehood declaration.

"We will now study and consult with the states which signed the peace agreements," Arafat said when asked

by reporters if he was still insisting on Palestinians' right to proclaim independence on May 4.

In the past Arafat has called May 4 — the date with the five-year interim autonomy period for the Palestinians laid down by the Oslo accords expires — as a "sacred date."

But Palestinian officials have been hinting in recent weeks that Arafat, at the demand of Europe, the United States and Egypt, could agree to put off the declaration in exchange for firm international support of the Palestinian goal of self-determination.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has frozen land-for-security agreements with the Pales-

tinians, has warned he will annex Palestinian territory still under Israel's control if the Palestinians declare statehood.

Tuesday one of Arafat's most senior negotiators, Nabil Shaath, also said that the Palestinians were now "studying" a postponement in the announcement of an independent state.

"We are studying an idea presented by friendly countries to delay by two or three weeks the proclamation of our independent state," Shaath admitted.

He said the aim was not to boost the position of Netanyahu and other Israeli right-wingers just ahead of Israeli general elections scheduled for

May 17.

Netanyahu effectively brought progress in the peace process to a halt by refusing to implement a second military redeployment from the West Bank due in December.

The Israeli government argued that the Palestinians were not fulfilling their side of the accord, including by continually saying they would unilaterally declare independence rather than negotiate the future of the occupied areas with Israel.

Di Rupo, who is due to meet Netanyahu on Thursday, called Wednesday for Israel to fulfil its commitments under October's Wye River agreement.

Syrians vote in referendum on Hafez Assad presidency

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syrians went to the polls in a festive atmosphere on Wednesday to cast their ballots in a referendum on a fifth seven-year term in office for President Hafez Al-Assad.

The referendum, which should have taken place on Monday, was postponed for two days because of the death of King Hussein.

Assad was a surprise guest at the King's state funeral in Amman on Monday and Syria declared three days of official mourning for the Jordanian monarch, whose relations with Damascus were often strained.

Parliament approved the 69-year-old Assad as the sole presidential candidate last month, after the ruling Baath Party submitted his name to deputies. There were no other candidates.

The more than 11,000 polling stations spread out across the country opened at 7:00 a.m. (0500 GMT) and are scheduled to close at 7:00 p.m. (1700 GMT).

Voting could be extended to 10:00 p.m. (2000 GMT), however.

Syrians aged 18 and over are eligible to vote and turnout was

high early in the day in the capital, Damascus. The results are expected to be announced on Thursday.

Voters are being given a voting slip asking if they are "In favour of the People's Assembly candidate Hafez Assad for the post of President of the Republic."

A "Yes" vote goes in a green-coloured circle underneath while a "No" vote goes in a grey-coloured box.

Mohammad Hazini, 40, said he had marked his ballot with a drop of his own blood after pricking his thumb with a pin. "I wanted to say 'yes' with my blood because that is what is most precious," he said.

In the run-up to the referendum, Damascus and other cities have been festooned with flags, portraits of Assad and coloured lights, giving the country a festive atmosphere.

Voters honked their horns and sang patriotic songs as they headed to polling booths here decorated with flowers, Syrian flags and portraits of Assad.

The Syrian media have been playing their part in the campaign, airing messages of support for Assad from personalities from Syria, the Arab World

and beyond.

"Syria Says 'Yes' to Our Leader Assad" was Wednesday's headline in the government newspaper Tishrin.

"Assad Forever." "Yes to the Master of the Country," say banners hanging from public buildings.

The estimated one million Syrians living in neighbouring Lebanon were also eligible to vote on Wednesday and headed in large numbers to polling stations opened across the country.

Traffic jams developed outside the three voting centers set up in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, residents said.

Syrian soldiers, some of the 35,000-Syrian contingent deployed in Lebanon, fired occasional celebratory gunshots into the air along the Beirut seafont promenade.

Assad, who was born in northern Syria near the coastal town of Latakia in 1930, took power in November 1970. He was first elected president in February 1971, and reelected in 1978, 1985 and 1992.

His current term expires on March 12.



A Jordanian woman holding a picture of late King Hussein waits for her turn outside the Zahran palace on Wednesday to offer her condolences to the grieving Royal family. After a day of pomp and ceremony for the state funeral of King Hussein, on Monday, ordinary Jordanians turned out in their thousands to offer their condolences (AFP photo)

U.N. votes for conference on Israeli settlements

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Despite Israeli and U.S. protests, the U.N. General Assembly has overwhelmingly approved a resolution calling for an international conference to enforce a ban on settlement activities in Israeli-occupied territories.

The vote was 115-2 with five abstentions — Australia, Bahamas, Cameroon, Romania and Swaziland.

The resolution, which is not legally binding, says that Israel is constructing new settlements in Arab east Jerusalem and other lands the Israelis occupied in 1967, and that the constructions violate the Fourth Geneva Convention.

It calls for Switzerland, as depository of the 1949 convention, to convene a conference on July 15 in Geneva to consider measures to enforce its provisions "in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem." The Palestinian U.N. observer, Nasser Al Kidwa, said the overwhelming vote had "great importance."

"We look forward to the convening of that conference on time. We look forward to the expected important results," he said.

But Switzerland's U.N.

observer, Jeno Staehelin, said his country could not play an active role in convening such a conference unless the signatories agree on measures to handle grave violations of the convention "wherever they occur." The convention bans the seizure of land by an occupying power — a provision the Palestinians and their supporters argue would ban settlement building.

The Palestinians say Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and Arab east Jerusalem threaten to change the makeup of these areas, even as their future is being negotiated.

They point to a 6,500 Israeli settlement units planned in Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab east Jerusalem, which they want as the capital of an independent Palestinian state. Israel claims all of Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel, a signatory to the Geneva Convention, does not recognise its application in the territory it occupied in the 1967 Mideast war.

"Israel views the attempts to convene a conference... as a vulgar distortion of international humanitarian law for the purpose of narrow political interests," Israeli U.N. Ambassador Dore Gold told the General Assembly

before the vote.

Israel has routinely ignored U.N. declarations regarding relations with the Arabs.

This is the fourth time in 18 months that the General Assembly has called for the convening of a conference.

Despite consultations with the signatories, Staehelin said many questions must be still be answered.

"That is the main reason why the conference has not yet been able to take place," he said. Among the unanswered questions: Can such a meeting be convened by an international organization or should the decision be taken by the signatories? What happens if one of the principle parties refuses to participate? How should decisions be made on conducting the conference? Who should cover the cost? The emergency General Assembly session began Friday and was supposed to conclude Monday.

But the final session was postponed until Tuesday to pay tribute to King Hussein.

During two days of speeches, speaker after speaker supported the Palestinians and demanded that Israel halt construction in contested areas and adhere to the peace agreements.

Baghdad takes wait-and-see stand on King Abdullah

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq, which did not comment officially on the passing away of King Hussein, is taking a wait-and-see position on King Abdullah, diplomats said Wednesday.

"The Iraqis are waiting, they are observing. They are waiting to see how the new King will act and get to know his positions," a high-ranking Baghdad-based diplomat said.

King Hussein's death was briefly announced by the Iraqi media with a small biography but without any commentary. Little-known Iraqi Vice President Taha Muhiuddin Maruf was sent to Amman to attend the state funeral.

Hundreds of Iraqis and Arabs resident in Iraq, as well as members of the capital's diplomatic corps, descended on the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad to sign their names in the condolence book. Diplomats said the lack of attention given to the King's death by Baghdad was probably due to the fact that "information in Iraq is inverted."

"This cannot be seen as hostility, but a sort of indifference," the diplomat said. "Any other information on world events would have been treated with the same indifference."

But he said Iraq had shown a "misplaced discretion" at the funeral, which was attended by most world leaders, including those, like Syrian President Hafez Assad, who had rocky relationships with Jordan.

"There was a move towards solidarity and reconciliation," the diplomat said.

Ties between Baghdad and Amman have thawed in recent months, after crises in 1995 and 1998, with the signing of an economic pact in February.

Iraqi Oil Minister Amer Mohanad Rushed on Wednesday pledged to maintain Iraq's oil exports to Jordan in line with an agreement for 4.8 million tonnes over 1999 finalized in January.

Prior to the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, Jordan was one of Iraq's main trading partners. But trade

collapsed when Iraq was placed under crippling U.N. sanctions for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. During a meeting on the sidelines of King Hussein's funeral, King Abdullah assured the Iraqi vice president that he wanted to strengthen ties with Baghdad.

He said his country "wanted to pursue bilateral relations and examine ways of developing them in the interest of the two brotherly peoples," the official Iraqi news agency INA said.

In an interview published by the Arabic language daily Al Hayat on Saturday, before the death of King Hussein, the new King pledged to continue "the traditional policy" of Jordan with Iraq. But he ruled out in present circumstances "a rehabilitation of the Iraqi regime."

Iraq did not react to these comments "so as not to provoke tension. Iraq wants to keep good ties with Jordan to avoid it moving towards the United States," a diplomat said.

"Iraq needs Jordan like Jordan needs Iraq," he added.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Greece, Cyprus increasing tension'

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey on Wednesday accused Greece and Cyprus of increasing tension in the region under a joint defence doctrine the two countries signed in 1993. "Greeks and Greek Cypriots are involved in efforts to exacerbate tension through what they call a joint defence doctrine but which is actually a joint attack doctrine," a spokesman of the Turkish foreign ministry, Sermet Atacanli, told reporters in Ankara.

Sheikh wants marriage outside courts banned

CAIRO (AP) — The top Islamic cleric in Egypt is urging the government to ban weddings conducted outside the courts, saying traditional, or "orfi," marriages do not confer adequate protection on wives, a newspaper reported Wednesday. Sheikh Mohammad Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar — the leading Islamic institute in the Sunni Muslim world — has long refused to conduct traditional weddings, but his lecture at the Cairo International Book Fair on Tuesday night was the first time he has called for their prohibition.

Iraq calls for dialogue with Arabs

CAIRO (AP) — A senior Iraqi official was quoted on Wednesday as calling on Arab countries to begin a dialogue to ease strained relations, saying his country poses no threat to its neighbours. Vice President Taha Ma'arouf spoke to the London-based Asharq Al Awsat in an interview in Amman, Jordan where he led the Iraqi delegation to King Hussein's funeral this week. "We call for the opening of a new page full of trust and cooperation instead of trading insults, accusations and enmities, let us think of consolidating the Arab stand," Ma'arouf said.

'Arms probes in Iraq should be intrusive'

UNITED NATIONS (R) — The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has estimated it would cost \$10 million a year to make sure Iraq did not build a bomb and advocated intrusive inspections be part of monitoring activities. In a report to the Security Council circulated on Tuesday, the Vienna-based IAEA, responsible for in charge of eliminating Iraq's atomic arms programme, said it had "no indication" that Baghdad had nuclear-related equipment or other materials. But it could not say with certainty that nothing further existed.

Russian emigration to Israel jumps

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The number of Russians emigrating to Israel jumped at least 30 per cent during the past two months compared to the same period a year earlier, officials said Wednesday. According to figures compiled by the Jewish Agency which oversees immigration, 3,320 immigrants arrived by plane from Russia during December and January, compared to 2,220 a year earlier. An unknown number of Russians also arrived in Israel by sea during the same period, the agency said.

Israeli soldier hurt in S. Lebanon attack

MARJAYOUN (R) — An Israeli soldier was wounded on Wednesday when Hizbollah guerrillas shelled positions around a Crusader castle in south Lebanon, security sources said. The sources said the soldier was injured at the castle which overlooks Amnour, a town on the edge of Israel's occupation zone. In Jerusalem, an Israeli army statement confirmed the attack and said the soldier had been "very lightly wounded" and was taken to hospital in Israel.

Don't fight army — Demirel

ANKARA (R) — Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, twice overthrown in army coups, has bluntly warned political parties jostling for position ahead of April elections against crossing the powerful military. "If you fight with the military you may satisfy a handful of mad people but you will also antagonise the armed forces and you will be the loser," he told the Turkish Daily News.

PRAYER TIMES

05:00 Fajr
06:18 Sunrise/Duha
11:50 Dhur
14:54 Asr
17:21 Maghreb
18:40 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la
Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 4637441
Greek Orthodox Church Tel.
4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh
Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church
Tel. 4624757
The English-Language
Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to rise on Thursday with clouds appearing at different altitudes. Scattered showers are also expected and winds southeasterly moderate. On Friday, temperatures will dip in the afternoon with rainfall in various regions. In Aqaba, it will be cloudy, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman05/17
Aqaba10/23
Deserts03/19
Jordan Valley10/23

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 14, Aqaba 20
Humidity readings: Amman
46 per cent, Aqaba 40 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Mazen Nabil530435
Dr. Abdul Majid Al Sha'ir4391405
Dr. Hani Al Ahmad4394336
Dr. Faltner Bilal5522233

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy5537004
Ruka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
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ZARQA:
Dr. Zuhour Al Qadi (05)906606
Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562

EMERGENCIES

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic, Abdi5666131/7
Husseini Medical Centre586856
Luzmila4630195
Khulidi Maternity4642816

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777
Fire Brigade4671011
Blood Bank4753121
Highway Police5343402
Traffic police4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints5603800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 4897487
Amman Municipality Complaints4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television4773111
Radio Jordan4774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5315155
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

AKILAH MATERNITY4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity4642362
Malhas, J. Amman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5607431
Jordan Hospital5607550
University Hospital5353444
Al-Musaher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Abdi, Abdi5664164/6
Indian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Basfir4751111/2
Army, Marka4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital5157100
Amal Hospital5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital(09)83323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital(09)986731
Al Hilma Modern Hospital(09)990390

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)27275
Ibn Sina Hospital(02)7103101
Rosaary Sisters Hospital(02)7102831, (02)7102011
Specialty Hospital(02)7103100

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic, Abdi5666131/7
Husseini Medical Centre586856
Luzmila4630195
Khulidi Maternity4642816

FOR THE TRAVELLER
QUEEN ALIA
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT
This information is supplied by
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Information

department at the Queen Alia
International Airport Tel.
(44)53200-5, where it should
always be verified. Information on
other flights can be supplied on
phone 44 (52700). Information on
Royal Wings flights can be supplied
on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:15Sanza (RJ)
08:25Bombay (RJ)
08:50Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
10:15Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:45Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:45Colombo (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
18:05Kuwait (RJ)
18:05Athens (RJ)
19:00Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
19:40Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)
22:50Lamaca (RJ)

Other Flights
13:15Riyadh (SV)
14:05Rome (AZ)
14:10Sharjah (AH)
14:45Doha (QR)
15:55Dubai (EK)
17:25Muscat, Dubai (GF)
18:40Beirut (ME)
19:05Paris (AF)
20:25Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40Cairo (MS)

23:10Istanbul (TK)
00:25Moscow (SU)
01:15Amsterdam (KL)
04:10London (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

For Thursday
08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA)
(RW)
09:35 Aqaba (arriving at Marka
Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka
Airport) (RW)
23:15 Tel Aviv (arriving at
QAIA) (RW)

For Friday

08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA)
(RW)
09:35 Aqaba (arriving at Marka
Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka
Airport) (RW)
17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA)
(RW)
18:40 Tel Aviv (arriving at
QAIA) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:30Beirut (RJ)
10:35Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
11:00Shannon, Chicago (RJ)
11:25Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:00Amsterdam, Paris (RJ)
12:05Kuwait (RJ)
12:15London (RJ)
12:15Athens (RJ)

19:35Lamaca (RJ)
20:10Cairo (RJ)
20:30Jeddah (RJ)
00:10Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)

Other Flights

06:35Damascus, London (BA)
07:10Frankfurt (LH)
14:45Riyadh (SV)
15:00Annabah, Algiers (AZ)
15:30Rome (AF)
15:35Doha (QR)
17:00Damascus, Dubai (EK)
18:15 Abu Dhabi, Muscat (GF)
20:00Beirut (ME)
21:10Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40Cairo (MS)
01:55Moscow (SU)
02:15Amsterdam (KL)
04:45Alexandria (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

For Thursday
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
19:45 Aqaba (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
20:15 Tel Aviv (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
21:00 Tel Aviv (from QAIA)
(RW)

For Friday

08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport)
(RW)
16:15 Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Cables of condolence continue to flow in

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Hussein Wednesday received a cable from Amman governor Tala' Nawaish, pledging his allegiance to the King and vowing to rally behind his leadership to pursue the march of love and loyalty that the late King Hussein has started.

Nawaish also sent a similar cable to HRH Crown Prince Hamzeh, pledging allegiance to him and wishing him success.

Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Mirai Kaabneh said the selection of HRH Prince Hamzeh as heir to the Throne, in implementation of the Royal desire of His Majesty King Hussein and with the blessing of the Hashemite Family Council, has received a hearty welcome by the Armed Forces personnel. Kaabneh reiterated the Armed Forces' loyalty and allegiance to the Hashemite Throne and pledge to follow in the firm path chartered by his leadership.

Crown Prince Hamzah also received cables from Director of the General Intelligence Department (GID) Samih Battikhi, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Field Mar-

shal Abdul Hafez Mirai Kaabneh, Public Security Department (PSD) Director General Lt. General Nasouh Muhieddin and Director of the Civil Defence Department (CDD) Major General Deeb Maani.

In his cable, Battikhi pledged the GID's allegiance and loyalty to the Hashemite Throne and praised the wise decision by King Abdullah, who selected Prince Hamzah as heir to the Throne after consulting the Hashemite Family Council.

"The clear and wise vision of King Abdullah in selecting Your Royal Highness as heir to the Throne gives Jordanians confidence and hope for a promising future," Battikhi said in his cable.

Lt. General Muhieddin sent a similar cable, renewing the PSD personnel's allegiance to the Hashemite leadership. Muhieddin wished the Crown Prince success in shouldering his responsibilities, under King Abdullah's leadership.

Maj. Gen. Maani sent a similar cable, pledging the CDD's loyalty and allegiance to the Hashemite leadership, and wishing the Crown Prince success.

Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Aqel Biltaji received cables of condolences from his counterparts in Egypt, Palestine and Israel. He also received cables from the President of the World Council for Tourism and Travel, the British Rolls Royce Club, and Travel Agents and Tour Operators in Britain, France and Belgium.

Information Minister Naser Judeh received a cable of condolence from President of the Federation of Arab News Agencies Rafiq Shallal.

The Iraqi National Accord (INA) issued a statement expressing deep sorrow and grief over the passing of King Hussein, and conveyed their heartfelt condolences to King Abdullah, the Hashemite family and the Jordanian people. The INA's political bureau said "the passing of King Hussein was a great shock to the Iraqi people, who will never forget his humanitarian and noble feelings towards them, and his efforts to ease their suffering."

The statement said the Iraqis will not forget King Hussein's call to maintain the unity of Iraq and

establish a democratic system in it, where all Iraqis can live in security, and tranquility.

Lauding King Hussein's efforts to build modern Jordan and to restore Arab and Islamic solidarity, the INA statement said, "the King has built modern Jordan and put it on the threshold of the 21st century, thus qualifying Jordan to occupy a unique status among the Middle East countries."

The statement added, "King Hussein has been concerned about Arab and Islamic solidarity, thus winning the respect and appreciation of Arab and Muslim nations, as well as the world at large."

The statement said, "The number of leaders and dignitaries who attended the King's funeral is a testimony to the prominent status he has enjoyed."

The INA wished King Abdullah success in leading Jordan towards more progress and prosperity, expressing confidence that King Abdullah will pursue his father's policy in further fostering Arab solidarity, establishing peace and defending human rights and respect for freedoms and human values."

Financial worries abate
Dinar market price remains steady...

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — Demand for the dollar has declined fifty per cent since the beginning of this week while the Jordanian market price of the dollar has remained stable since the news of His Majesty King Hussein's death, money exchangers said Wednesday.

After the close of the first working day since a three-day public mourning period, moneychangers reported normal demand for the dollar, and said that on several occasions, Jordanians were selling their dollars.

Earlier this week, moneychangers and bankers feared a run on the dollar after unpromising news about King Hussein's health. Some moneychangers reported that demand was up, while bankers said that they had not noticed any unusual purchasing activity.

The market's closing price of the dollar on Wednesday ranged from 713-714 fils.

"The minute difference between the selling and buying price of the dollar is an indication of the market's stability," said Abdul Ghani Sadat, from an exchange company downtown.

Earlier last year, when the King left the country for the United States for treatment of a non-Hodgkins lymphoma, which claimed his life on Sunday after a six-month battle, Jordan witnessed a capital flight of approximately \$400 million in a matter of days.

"People last summer were unsure about the future of the country after the King's sudden

departure, which explains the panic buying," said Muti'a Kabarili, head of Foreign Exchange Commission.

In 1988 Jordan dinar witnessed the worst crash when the dinar collapsed in front of the dollar, losing almost half its value due to the inability of the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) to meet the country's demand for hard currency. However, Jordanians were assured this week when promises of foreign aid to Jordan started raining down from the international community.

The American President Bill Clinton said he would request that Congress urgently grant \$300 million to Jordan. The United Arab Emirates also said it would deposit a yet-undisclosed amount of money in the CBJ to bolster confidence in the dinar.

According to bankers, the deposit ranges from \$250-\$400 million.

The World Bank added its voice to the chorus of concern and said it is studying the possibility of extending new credits to Jordan, or giving the green light to creditor countries to reschedule Jordan debts.

Other countries also have promised to send aid, but did not specify the amount or the manner in which the aid will be extended.

According to Kabarili, by the beginning of next week, the dollar price should decline when banks open their doors after the official week-long mourning period.

He expects the Central Bank to continue providing unrestricted access to the dollar.

The Central Bank has reserved around \$100 million in cash in

order to meet the market's demands. Jordan's foreign currency reserves stand at \$1.2 billion.

"People at the beginning were afraid that things could go wrong if the King died, but the transfer of power has been very smooth, ensuring political as well as economic stability in the country," added Kabarili.

Nevertheless, Jordan's dinar lost around 10 per cent of its value in front of the shekel earlier this month in occupied Jerusalem and the West Bank, after international news agencies leaked reports about the King's deteriorating health, but bankers and exchangers blamed the phenomenon on a panic buying in the occupied areas, when Jordanians banks had closed last Friday for the Islamic holiday.

Meanwhile, the Amman Financial Market saw a decline in trading volume but later the price index regained around three per cent in the total share price index.

According to one broker, who cannot be named according to market regulations, the gain was due to more "rational" buying.

The broker expects that when the Amman Financial Market opens again on Saturday, the market will be active, with a greater emphasis on buying and a pursuant hike in prices.

"The market will be active, but at the same time it will be selective," he said, referring to companies which deal directly with Iraq.

"Those companies will have to find other markets to expand their activities in order to boost their prices in the market."

...as financial aid bolsters confidence

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — Businessmen and economists Tuesday welcomed offers of new international aid to help boost Jordan's economic stability but said the money should be spent on water schemes and intensive labour projects.

Others said the country of 4.2 million people, saddled with a \$6.5 billion foreign debt, should focus on fighting endemic bureaucracy and on achieving economic self-sufficiency.

Many officials and diplomats say His Majesty King Abdullah, who took the reins of power after the death of his father, His Majesty King Hussein on Sunday, faces mounting economic woes worsened by soaring poverty, unemployment and a looming water crisis.

He has won overwhelming pledges of economic support from Washington, Britain, Japan, the oil-rich Gulf Arab states and world institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — all keen to maintain the country's stability.

However, Jordanian businessmen and economists said focus should be on easing the burden of foreign debt in a country where one in five citizens is living below the poverty line and where unemployment officially stands at 16 per cent and unofficially at up to 27 per cent.

They said officials should campaign more aggressively for debt swaps, debt forgiveness and debt rescheduling in addition to facilitating bilateral trade.

Pledges of economic aid were mostly declared on Sunday and on Monday, when King Hussein's body was laid to rest amid a galaxy of 50 world leaders, prime ministers and top officials who streamed into Jordan to pay last respects.

Jordan has for years lobbied for

debt forgiveness, however, some countries like Japan cannot call off the debts because it is against their regulations. Japan is Jordan's top donor; its loans since 1990 are estimated at \$1 billion.

"This money is important for financial, political, and moral reasons," said economist Fahed Al Fanek. "It proves that we are not alone at difficult times; and that we have the support of all nations especially the United States and Arab nations."

While some economists had some reservations on additional loans on the grounds they would further swell the foreign debt, most of them agreed the bulk of aid should go on finding short- and long-term solutions for the water problem.

"Water is a top priority," said Yusuf Mansour, head of competitiveness unit at the Planning Ministry.

"We must guarantee good, clean drinking water for our citizens, then we have to work on desalination of the water, which is a big project, because we need it for the future."

Jordan has long been suffering from water shortages. The problem worsened last July when the quality of domestic water deteriorated dramatically, forcing the government to halt supplies for over four weeks. The then-water minister, Munther Haddadin, had to resign.

Commercial and labour-intensive projects should be the country's second economic priority, experts said.

"We need to invest in productive infrastructure projects and on repaying our debts," added Fanek.

Mansour also stressed the need to spend on vocational training and modernising the labour force.

"I'm really concerned with getting people to do more and to create better workers. We need technicians and plumbers, but we must improve their qualifications."

However, some businessmen warned that additional loans might not necessarily help to boost Jordan's economy and insisted that debt forgiveness was more essential.

"We don't need more loans, we must write off our debts first," said Hamdi Tabba'a, chairman of the Jordan Businessmen's Association and former trade minister.

He said additional aid would swell the overall debt and future repayments.

Taxes are the main burden on Jordan because we need to pay our debts. At the same time, the government knows that it cannot impose more (direct and indirect) taxes on the population," added Tabba'a. "Eliminating debts would strengthen the dinar."

"Jordan must learn how to manage its economy in a different way. The new king knows that Jordan should prepare itself to a new stage and we must set priorities."

However, Fanek disagreed. He argued that additional loans would not necessarily increase the debt volume.

"If we invest money in commercial projects and build more factories then we can repay all our debts because the economy will grow. We can have new funds without calling off the debts," Fanek told the Jordan Times.

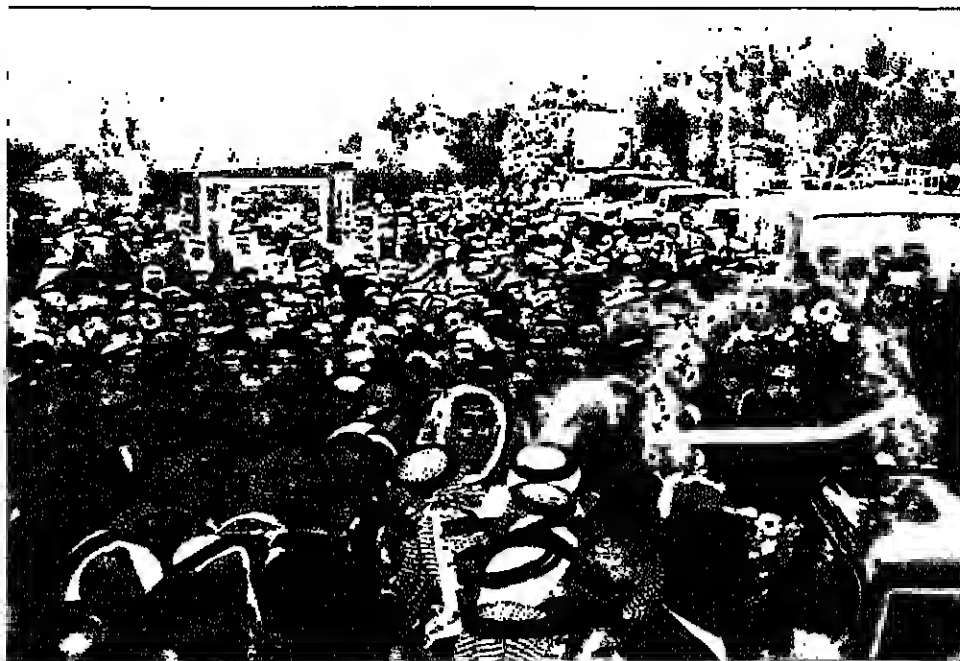
On the other hand, Tabba'a asserted that Jordan should be "more cautious."

"We should not get more loans if we do not have feasibility studies for the projects in which we are investing," he said.

Alternatively, Tabba'a suggested establishing joint ventures with lending countries.

"If these countries create joint ventures with us, it means that they believe in Jordan, in the regime and in the potentials of the economy."

Jordanians flood streets to condole Royal Family



Men queued for more than a kilometre in front of the Raghadan Palace, where His Majesty King Abdullah received condolences from mourning Jordanians (photo by Yusef Alan)

Her Majesty Queen Noor yesterday receives condolences from a fellow mourner at Zahran Palace. Queen Noor, King Abdullah and the rest of the Royal family have received thousands of mourners since the death of King (AP photo)



His Majesty King Abdullah yesterday shakes the hand of a mourner during the second day of condolence ceremonies at Raghadan Palace. (Petra photo)



Cabinet praises international community, pledges to maintain Jordan's high standing

AMMAN — (Petra) The Cabinet on Wednesday held a session to discuss the international gathering Jordan recently witnessed when Arab and international delegations attended the funeral of His Majesty King Hussein.

In its meeting, the Council of Minister, headed by Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh, praised the Arab and international stands, stressing that Jordan will maintain its distinguished and good relations with the international communi-

ty, which were created by King Hussein. The Cabinet also reviewed the prime minister's bilateral meetings with heads and members of the delegations.

Meanwhile Tarawneh received cables of condolence from the following countries, organisations and dignitaries: Palestinian National Authority President Yasser Arafat, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Dutch prime minister, the Spanish prime minister, the prime minister of Mauritius, the prime minister

of Italy, the Turkish prime minister, the Australian prime minister, Austrian federal councillor, Kuwaiti Defence Minister and Vice-President of the Council of Ministers Sheikh Salem Sabah, Moroccan Prime Minister Abdul Rahman Yousfi, the Swedish prime minister, Omani Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Ben Mahmud Al Saeed, the Greek prime minister, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassem Ben Jaber Al Thani, Egypt's Vice-President of the Al

Umah Party Abdullahi Abu Heif, the Arab City Organisation Secretary General Abdul Aziz Youssef Adani, the president of the International Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent, General Manager of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development Abdullahi Youssef Al Hamad and the Syrian former Supply and Trade Minister Hassan Saqqa.

Little progress at Kosovo talks

RAMBOUILLET, France (AP) — Despite the American mediator's report of progress at Kosovo peace talks, ethnic Albanian rebels and rival Serbs demanded several changes Wednesday to a U.S.-sponsored plan.

The two delegations remained far from any agreement after three full days of talks at the 14th-century French chateau where they are meeting.

Serb-led Yugoslavia was demanding a formal pledge to keep the country's borders intact, and Albanian negotiators were calling for a referendum on independence, an immediate ceasefire and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) guarantees for the eventual interim settlement.

In a statement Wednesday, the rebel ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) listed its demands, saying it would not give up independence for the province where more than 2,000 people have died and hundreds of thousands left homeless in a year of fighting.

In the statement, distributed to the ethnic Albanian media in Kosovo, the KLA also demanded a formal ceasefire be signed with the Serb side and guaranteed by a third party. The KLA called the demand "fundamental."

The Serb government considers the KLA terrorists, and has refused to sign a ceasefire because that would amount to a de facto recognition of the KLA.

Despite claims of progress Tuesday by chief U.S. mediator Christopher Hill, sources close to the delegations said the two sides had not agreed on a single word of the peace plan.

Progress, in the view of the mediators, appears to mean the delegations are actively studying the text of the proposal.

"This is not easy, and frankly it's not a lot of fun... but we are making progress," said Hill, who heads the team of three mediators shuttling between Serb and ethnic Albanian delegations. The two sides are staying on different floors and have not met face-to-face.

The KLA rebels, who have five members on the ethnic Albanian delegation, said further demands include release of all political prisoners held in Kosovo or free return to the province of those sentenced in absentia.

Another request was to allow an investigation of alleged war crimes in Kosovo by the U.N. tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands.

"Above all we demand our legitimate right to recognise the independence of Kosovo through a clear and indisputable formulation with fixed dates and with a distinct mechanism which will secure Kosovo to become independent," said the statement.

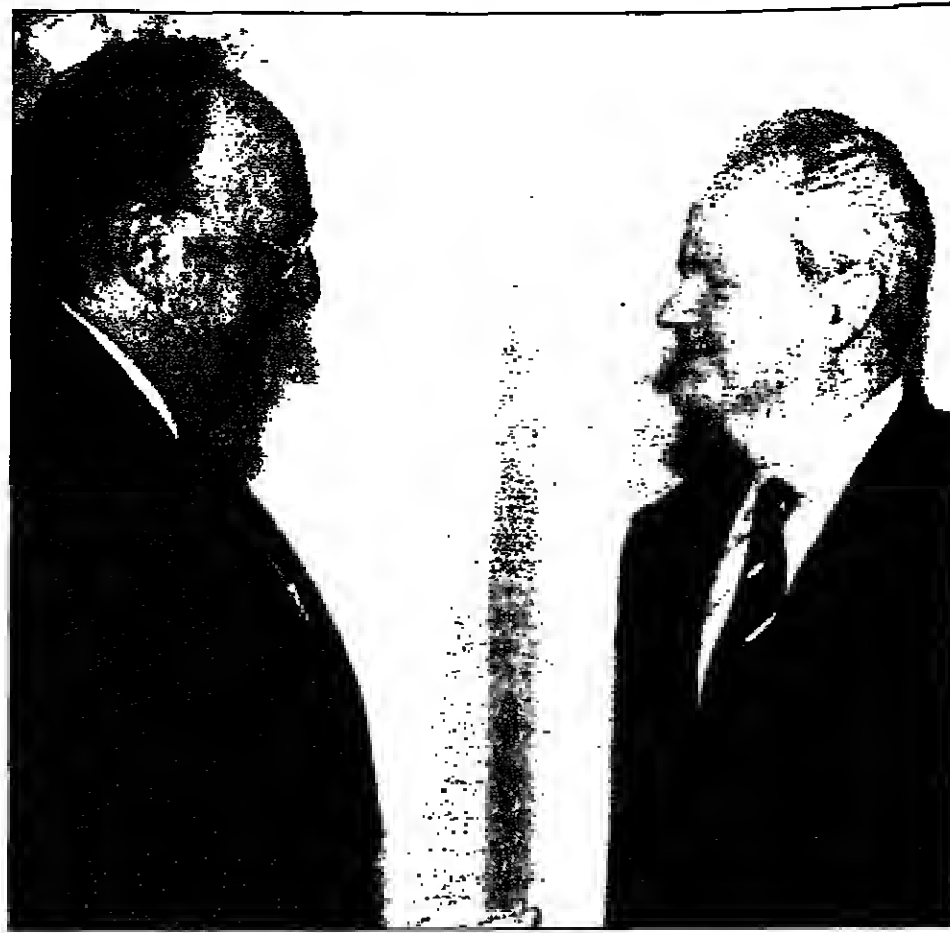
The Albanian delegation in the Rambouillet meeting is not going to give up its demand for independence, it said.

The Serbian side has also filed a series of complaints about the peace plan, which was handed to them when negotiations began Sunday, sources close to the delegation said.

The Serbs said the plan virtually separates Kosovo, their medieval heartland, from Serbia. They want the ethnic Albanian delegation to publicly sign their pledge that Kosovo will not become independent.

Belgrade's state-run Politika daily, which is close to hard-line Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, said in a commentary Wednesday that "the key point of the current stage of negotiating is that Kosovo remains part of Serbia and Yugoslavia."

Under the plan, Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority would be given virtual autonomy during an interim period of at least three years. But the province



Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic (right) smiles while listening to Greek Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos prior to talks in Belgrade. Pangalos said Tuesday that in any kind of agreement it be clearly specified that independence for Kosovo is to be excluded now and in the future (Reuters photo)

would remain part of Serb-led Yugoslavia.

NATO generals are working on plans to dispatch 25,000-30,000 troops to Kosovo, including up to 4,000 Americans, to enforce the peace agreement.

Russia strongly opposes the NATO threat of force. A Western military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Tuesday that discussion of a NATO

deployment is being put off until the end of the talks to avoid a diplomatic dispute with the Russians.

Yugoslav Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic said in Belgrade that autonomy for Kosovo would be no problem. But he said "under no condition" would foreign peacekeeping troops be allowed there.

Also Wednesday, a spokesman for international verifiers said Serb authori-

ties have agreed to release all 40 bodies of ethnic Albanians slain in January in the Racak massacre, which paved the way for the current peace talks.

The bodies have remained unburied because of a struggle between Serbs trying to avoid the spectacle of a highly publicised mass funeral and ethnic Albanian politicians seeking to draw attention to what they say was a Serb atrocity.

Primakov, party chiefs to discuss Kremlin non-aggression pact

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian Premier Yevgeny Primakov was to hold talks Wednesday on a non-aggression pact between parliament and the Kremlin, under which President Boris Yeltsin would cede some powers.

The talks with party chiefs in the state Duma lower house of parliament were due to get underway behind closed doors around 5:00 p.m. (1400 GMT), but the accord was already facing opposition from leftists and liberals.

Communist Party boss Gennady Zyuganov said his bloc, the largest in parliament, would put forward its own alternative proposals at the meeting.

Acceptance of the current draft would be tantamount to "acting in the tragicomedies staged by President Yeltsin," he said.

Primakov launched his surprise initiative last month saying the pact would provide Russia with a measure of political stability in the run-up to legisla-

tive elections due in December.

Analysts suggested the move was an attempt by Primakov to protect his own position... as he struggles whether to contest the presidency in elections due in 2000.

Yeltsin's chief of staff Nikolai Bordyuzha said the president had accepted the draft accord — under which the Russian leader would agree not to dismiss parliament or the premier — as a basis for negotiations.

In exchange parliament would drop attempts to amend the 1993 constitution, which was tailor-made for Yeltsin and hands the head of state sweeping powers at the expense of the legislature.

The current text, approved by Russia's influential Security Council last week, did not however include Primakov's original suggestion that lawmakers' drop impeachment proceedings against Yeltsin as a quid pro quo.

Nikolai Ryzhkov, leader of the leftist People's Power

group in the Duma, told the private NTV television station earlier that parliamentary leaders were unlikely to approve the current proposal as it stood.

"Primakov is sufficiently intelligent and a good diplomat, and he understands very well that such questions must be resolved through compromise."

"We cannot accept 100 per cent the viewpoint we have received from the president," he said, predicting "a lot of work" ahead.

Zyuganov insisted that both houses of parliament should vote on five impeachment articles under preparation against Yeltsin, and amendments to the constitution which would redistribute some of the head of state's vast powers.

Sergei Ivanenko, deputy head of the liberal Yabloko faction, dismissed the proposed peace pact as "a useless, rather than harmful document."

Constitutional reform was a major plank in the party's election platform, he told the Interfax news agency.

Australia presses E. Timor to stay with Indonesia

SYDNEY (AFP) — Australian Prime Minister John Howard has urged East Timor to remain part of Indonesia, saying independence would heighten the threat of instability.

Howard came under attack from the opposition for his comments late Tuesday, which came amidst reports of new troubles in the neighbouring former Portuguese colony.

"There would be an economic and strategic vulnerability there would be the potential for ongoing tension between Indonesia and the independent East Timor of the type that might not exist if East Timor were an autonomous part of Indonesia," Howard said.

"I want to see continued diplomatic effort invested, not only by Australia but by others to try and persuade the Indonesians and the East Timorese of the virtues of the preference I've expressed."

He told ABC television he hoped that if autonomy was not possible the transition to independence would be as orderly as possible.

East Timor, which was invaded by Indonesia in 1975, has returned to the international spotlight following Indonesia's announcement that it would

consider independence for the territory if an autonomy offer was rejected.

The United Nations and most nations do not recognise Indonesian sovereignty. 'Australia is one of the few countries that does recognise Indonesia's claim to the territory, where 200,000 people are estimated by independent observers to have died in violence and from starvation and illness since 1975.

Pro-Indonesian armed militia are still being accused of terrorising pro-independence East Timorese people.

Australian opposition foreign affairs spokesman Laurie Brereton said Howard's message sent a disturbing signal to pro-integrationist militia groups seeking to block East Timorese self-determination.

"Mr. Howard's confirmation that the full weight of Australian diplomacy is being marshalled to support East Timor's continued incorporation within Indonesia can only give encouragement to paramilitary thugs who are seeking to block East Timorese self-determination," Brereton said.

"They will take heart both from what Mr. Howard said, and

from what he chose not to say."

With daily reports of rising violence by pro-integrationist forces, the Howard government should also give a clear in-principle commitment for Australian participation in a United Nations monitoring force for East Timor, he added.

Howard would not discuss the question of a U.N. force. Howard was also accused by East Timorese independence campaigners of supporting continued Indonesian oppression in the territory to protect Australia's access to cheap oil in the Timor Gap.

"It is obvious that he will continue to persist in his callous and inhumane policy of supporting the Indonesian dictatorship because he wants Timor's oil at a cheap price," the Campaign for an Independent East Timor said.

Campaign spokesman Andrew Alcock said Indonesia had recently stepped up the arming and training of anti-independence militias and pleas for their disarmament had been ignored. "Sadly the world community is still not prepared to put a halt to the criminal brutality being committed in East Timor by the Habibie regime," he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Washington to help set up human-rights observatory in Colombia

BOGOTA (AFP) — The United States will help set up a human rights observatory in Colombia to track violations and draft laws and policies protecting fundamental rights, Vice President Gustavo Bell said. The observatory, which the United States will fund through the International Cooperation Agency, will be the first of several human rights initiatives to get U.S. backing in Colombia. Bell said after meeting here Tuesday with U.S. Ambassador Curtis Kamman. "Our goal is to map human rights violations in Colombia, determine how and where they occur, so the government can craft policies that better target the root causes," Bell said. He said the United States would also finance a seminar on military justice in which U.S. legal experts would impart their experience in the field to their Colombian counterparts. The vice president warned that despite the cooperation, the upcoming U.S. government report on the state of human rights around the world would likely be "very critical" of Colombia.

Beijing mayor resigns, ending reshuffle after huge graft scandal

BEIJING (AFP) — Beijing mayor Jia Qinglin resigned Wednesday to make way for his new deputy and complete a major reshuffle in the capital's government that was prompted by a \$2.2 billion graft scandal in 1995. Jia, 58, bowed out in favour of 56-year-old Liu Qi, who became executive vice-mayor in April last year in preparation for the move. Jia himself maintains the more powerful position of Beijing party secretary, and his resignation completes a major reshuffle in the capital's power structure after a purge in the wake of the 1995 graft scandal involving then-party secretary Chen Xitong and then-mayor Li Qiyuan. "The Beijing government will focus on further emancipating minds, logical decision-making and maintaining a clean and honest government," new mayor Liu Qi told the official Xinhua news agency. Major scandal broke in Beijing in early 1995 when a deputy mayor who was being investigated for corruption committed suicide. Within two weeks, party secretary Chen Xitong was fired from the post and the following year, mayor Li Qiyuan was forced to resign. The scandal involved a pyramid investment scheme, the Capital Iron and Steel Works and kickbacks on construction deals. According to Beijing officials, the capital lost \$2.2 billion from its coffers. New mayor Liu Qi was born in eastern Jiangsu province and was minister of metallurgy until March 1998 when the ministry was disbanded and he was moved to executive vice-mayor of Beijing.

Zimbabwe riot police stop student demonstration

HARARE (R) — Zimbabwe riot police fired tear gas Wednesday to prevent university students demonstrating in the capital amid a deepening political crisis. Thousands of students later gathered on the University of Harare campus and police units kept vigil outside the college gates, witnesses said. Police were also on guard at strategic points in central Harare. Students said they wanted to protest over President Robert Mugabe's criticism of judges who had urged him to restate his government's commitment to the rule of law. They said they were also angry over Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the arrest of journalists, alleged economic mismanagement and delays in payment of grants. Mugabe last week plunged the country into a constitutional crisis when he repudiated Zimbabwe's highest court, which had asked him to reaffirm his government's respect for courts. The request from the supreme court judges followed the army's failure to abide by three court orders to release detained reporters. Mugabe accused the courts of meddling in politics and urged the judges to resign.

Lovelorn albatross falls hard for decoy, gets cold shoulder

TOKYO (AP) — In the dating game, persistence often pays off. But Deko, a 5-year-old albatross on an island south of Tokyo, has set himself an impossible goal. For two years he has been trying to woo what he believes to be the love of his life. He's built her fancy nests, fought off rival suitors, and spent countless days standing faithfully by her side. But Deko, it seems, is kind of a dodo. His one-and-only is a man-made decoy and despite the blank stare and wooden personality, he still hasn't caught on. The decoy is one of nearly 100 placed on the Izu islands, 600 kilometres south of Tokyo, to attract endangered albatrosses and encourage them to breed, a spokeswoman for the Yamashina Institute of Ornithology in Chiba prefecture (state) said Wednesday. "We hope Deko will fall in love with a real albatross but he usually just ignores them and sometimes even drives them away," institute researcher Fumio Sato wrote in a recent newsletter. Researchers at the institute have also set up speakers on the islands to broadcast albatross mating calls. The experiment, begun in 1991, has been successful in attracting albatrosses to land on the islands and mingle with other birds. A few have even mated and produced offspring. The decoys were designed to be very life-like, but maybe too much so for Deko. His unrequited love was revealed to scientists by surveillance cameras on the island. Sato worries the bird's infatuation with the decoy is keeping him from meeting a mate. "He seems to have no desire to date real birds," Sato observed.

12 dead in French avalanche

CHAMONIX, France (AFP) — Twelve people were killed after an avalanche swept over some 20 chalets in a French Alpine village near here, officials said in the latest toll issued Wednesday. Rescuers found two more dead amid the debris and snow from Tuesday's avalanche, up from a previous toll of 10 dead. A wall of snow some six metres high and 200 metres wide swept down a mountainside, crossing a river before climbing up the opposite hillside and crashing into the cluster of chalets in the village of Tour. Many of the homes were pulverised.

Tainted liquor kills 11 in southern India

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — Tainted liquor killed 11 people in a village in southern India Wednesday and landed 14 others in the hospital, a domestic news agency reported. The dead included 10 men and a woman, who died in Punalur village in Tamil Nadu state after consuming a local brew, Press Trust of India quoted police as saying. Seven local police officers were suspended Wednesday pending an investigation into the deaths, the news agency reported. It did not describe the charges against the officers. Liquor poisons occur frequently in India. Unauthorised manufacturers mix methyl alcohol with their homemade brew to give it more punch, but too much can affect the nervous system, causing blindness or death.

Over 300 missing after ship sinks in Indonesian waters

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Rescue teams in Indonesia searched Wednesday for as many as 312 people who were on board a passenger ship that sank in stormy seas between Borneo and Sumatra islands.

So far, 19 people have been rescued. But hopes of finding more survivors were fading four days after the apparent accident took place.

The newspaper Kompas reported the Herta Rimba, with 325 passengers and a crew of seven, took on water in bad weather and sank after being swamped by big waves Saturday night off Tambora Island, about 800 kilometres north of Jakarta, Indonesia's capital.

Officials on nearby Riau Island said nine people were rescued Sunday and another 10 were picked up Tuesday. One body was also found. The rest were missing.

Navy Sgt. Mardi said a search was being conducted Wednesday by an Indonesian warship and one aircraft.

"We haven't made any progress on the rescue. So far only 20 passengers including crew were found and one was dead," said search and

rescue official Mentereng Sakti in a telephone interview.

"Around midnight, bad weather and big waves came, then the ship started sinking," Kompas quoted the ship's captain, Hermanto, as saying.

Hermanto and several other survivors were rescued by a passing cargo ship.

He said the Herta Rimba, a 30-metre long wooden ship, departed from Kuala Sumbas on the west coast of Borneo early Saturday morning for Pekanbaru on Sumatra.

The official Antara news agency said the vessel was also carrying a cargo of timber.

Hermanto said he distributed 200 life jackets to those on board after the ship started to fill with water. Others were ordered to cling to blocks of wood and drums to stay afloat.

It was not immediately clear how far the ship was from land when it sank.

Indonesia is made up of more than 13,000 islands and relies heavily of sea transport. However, passengers and cargo vessels are often poorly maintained and overloaded.

Anwar gagged as Malaysian judge orders media blackout

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — The judge in the trial of ousted Malaysian deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim ordered a media blackout Wednesday on remarks allegedly made by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and former police chief Rahim Noor.

The ruling followed Anwar's detailed morning testimony on circumstances surrounding his dismissal by Mahathir in September, including two separate meetings with the prime minister and the police chief.

"Pending proof of their statements, there should be no publication of the statements made by the two persons," Justice Augustine Paul told the court as the corruption trial resumed after the daily lunch break of almost two hours.

Justice Paul later said his ruling also covered Anwar's "conversations" with Mahathir and Rahim, "in particular alleged statements made by the prime minister and the IGP (inspector general of police)."

He ordered an additional blackout on allegations Anwar earlier made against

International Trade and Industry Minister Rafidah Aziz.

"Please take note that the statement on Rafidah Aziz is not to be published," he said, prompting a question from lead defence counsel Raja Aziz Addruse.

"I thought it was only statements related to the prime minister and the IGP," he said.

Anwar himself then interjected. "It is my personal knowledge and I have documents signed by Gani Patail," he said, referring to senior deputy public prosecutor Abdul Gani Patail, who has been leading the case against Anwar.

But Justice Paul dismissed Anwar's objections.

"That is documentary hearsay," he said, indicating indirect evidence would not be allowed.

A lawyer for the prosecution team told AFP "there's no basis for the comments unless you are going to call them" as witnesses in the marathon trial which started in early November. Anwar "must have some basis to say that," he added.

Anwar, 51, is on trial on four

charges of corruption alleging he abused his position to get police to cover up sexual misconduct allegations against him. He also faces a fifth corruption charge and five counts of sodomy.

During the morning session, Anwar gave accounts of at least 10 meetings with Mahathir from the end of June last year and offered graphic testimony on the relationship between the two from early August. He also gave details of their meeting on Sept. 2 when he was fired.

Attorney-General Mohar Abdullah, who has been leading the prosecution team himself since Anwar took the witness stand Monday, objected that Anwar was raising the issue of a political plot to oust him.

But Justice Paul, who ruled Tuesday that any evidence of a political conspiracy was "irrelevant," overruled the objection.

Anwar said that Mahathir's closest ally, Daim Zaiduddin, told him on Aug. 12 last year that the attorney general was considering charges against him.

"I went straight to the prime

minister's office," he said before giving an account of the meeting, prompting an objection from the prosecution.

Anwar then interjected. "This is the truth, you will be very happy to hear," he said, prompting cheering and clapping from his relatives in the courtroom.

Justice Paul warned the crowd to calm down, saying: "Anybody who believes this is a theatre may leave and clap outside."

Anwar also gave a detailed account of his separate meeting with the police chief in late August, adding that he was "shocked" by the outcome.

"I do not know what to do with my defence because they are so interrelated. The police conspiracy cannot stand alone. I am helpless," Anwar added, before Justice Paul asked defence lawyers to "control their client."

Anwar also described his arrest on Sept. 20, when he was assaulted "Gestapo-style" by police before his first court appearance with a black eye. Mahathir ordered an inquiry into the beating last month.



Remains of the helicopter burn down at the top of the building in central business district of Cape Town. Four people died in the crash of the helicopter which carried aircondition equipment (AFP photo)

Helicopter crashes into Cape Town building

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A helicopter crashed onto the roof of a building opposite a luxury hotel in the centre of Cape Town Wednesday morning, and four people aboard were killed.

The chopper had just lowered an air conditioner onto the roof of the office building and was lifting off at about 6:30 a.m. when a rotor struck a billboard, said police spokesman Capt. Mark Romburgh.

The craft fell back, crashed and

exploded into a fireball, killing all four aboard, he said.

Romburgh said parts of the helicopter flew off and struck the hotel, seriously damaging an unoccupied room and causing minor damage to another room. The occupant there suffered no injuries.

Louis Vosloo, an amateur photographer and friend of the pilot, was in the hotel taking pictures of the operation. He said the accident occurred as the crew was preparing to lower the air conditioning equip-

ment on a neighbouring building.

"The guy made a 90 degree turn to the left, whereby he was going to position himself where he would slowly drop the unit," Vosloo said.

"At that moment, I realised the tail rotor was going to hit the advertising board. That was a very horrific thought because I could do nothing."

"As he hit the advertising board, the tail rotor snapped," he said.

"The fuselage of the helicopter

plummeted to the ground. As it hit the top of the building, there was a big fireball," Vosloo said.

The seven-story, green and white building was across the street from the Cape Sun InterContinental, one of the city's major hotels.

The building was on Strand Street, one of the city's main thoroughfares in a commercial area. Television footage showed the blackened roof of the building with smoke rising from the wreckage.

Myanmar government deplores U.S., British boycott of heroin conference

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) — The government of Myanmar expressed regret Wednesday that the United States and Britain will not be sending representatives to an international conference on the heroin trade to be held in the Myanmar capital at the end of the month.

A Myanmar government news release received in Bangkok said the two Western nations "bear a special responsibility to work with the rest of the international community" because as major markets for heroin they fuel the international drug trade.

The U.S. has been sharply critical of Myanmar's military regime, alleging it has failed to make serious efforts to shut down the Southeast Asian country's massive drug industry.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is believed to be the world's biggest producer of heroin, though some estimates put Afghanistan

ahead of it.

Washington also applies a broad range of sanctions against Myanmar, including limits on official contacts, to show disapproval of the regime's poor human rights record and failure to turn over power to an elected government.

The conference on heroin production and trafficking, to be held in Yangon from Feb. 23-26, is being organised by Interpol, the Lyon, France-based international organisation that serves as a clearinghouse for the exchange of information between national police agencies.

"The international drug trade is an urgent problem which needs to be addressed in a spirit of mutual cooperation by the entire world community," said the Myanmar government statement.

It said the United States and Britain have huge markets for heroin which "fuel a global narcotics trade

which threatens to infect many countries in the developing world, including Myanmar."

"The Government of Myanmar ... urges them to put politics aside, for the sake of the millions of people around the world whose lives are threatened by the drug trade," it said.

Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Italy have also reportedly decided to boycott the conference. All are members of the European Union, which has a position similar to that held by the U.S. regarding Myanmar's military government.

The Australia Burma Council, a group opposed to the Yangon regime, Wednesday issued a statement calling on Australia to also boycott the heroin conference.

The statement said the group had sent a letter to Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer saying Australia's presence "would

lend legitimacy to the (Myanmar) regime."

"Australia's attendance and support of this conference will be an obnoxious admission of a softening of national policy and will bring no good to the people of Burma nor will it aid us in our bid to have a drug-free society," said the statement from the Australia-based group.

International experts differ on the seriousness of the Myanmar government's anti-drug efforts, which are publicised extensively in its state-controlled press.

It has seized increasing quantities of heroin and opium in recent years, but some experts suggest that middle-ranking officers take money to turn a blind eye to the trade.

They also point out that a number of prominent former drug dealers who have turned themselves in have been allowed to freely invest profits from their activities.

China reports 2,500 blasts in 1998 crime wave

BEIJING (R) — An average of nine explosions rocked China each day last year as part of a growing crime wave, the government's top think-tank said in a report seen Wednesday.

Police investigated 1.35 million crime cases in the first nine months of 1998, up 22 per cent over the previous year, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said in its annual White Paper on social issues.

Those cases included 2,500 blasts, an increase of nine per cent, the report said. It gave no details about the explosions.

Murder cases jumped 5.8 per cent year-on-year to 21,000.

Police and state media have confirmed at least seven bombings this year. Thirty-

three people were killed and more than 100 injured.

The report blamed rising crime on joblessness, widening income disparities and anger at rampant corruption.

By last September, there were 10.7 million "xia gang" workers, or workers laid off from money-losing state-owned enterprises but who still receive partial pay, the report said.

There were also 170 million surplus rural workers.

"Their sense of loss is the strongest in the entire society," said sociologist Lu Jianhua, one of the authors of the White Paper.

A 1998 survey of about 2,300 urban and rural residents in 22 provinces showed that corruption was the top concern of 65.2 per cent of respondents, the report said.

The average actual income of rural residents grew four per cent in 1998 compared with 4.6 per cent in 1997, it said. The rural-urban income ratio rose to 1:2.6 last year from 1:2.46 in 1997.

Communist Party chief Jiang Zemin highlighted his worries over social unrest in December when he urged officials to "nip in the bud" any threats to stability.

A survey conducted last year showed that on a scale of one to five the sense of security felt by residents slipped to 3.42 in 1998 from 3.57 in 1997. Five was high, one low.

"Political stability will become the government's top theme of consideration in 1999," Lu said.

Joblessness would remain an acute problem, and the government would step up an

anti-crime campaign, he said.

Officials are particularly worried about social stability this year because of a string of sensitive anniversaries, including the 10th anniversary of the June 4 Tiananmen Square massacre and the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

Lu said local authorities would be more "active and prudent" in attending to the grievances of peasants.

China was expected to intensify a crackdown on corruption to restore the image of the Communist Party, Lu said.

The grip of the Communist Party is faltering in the countryside, home to 900 million Chinese, or three-quarters of the population. Leaders have warned that corruption threatens Communist rule.

Sri Lankan soldiers get 10 years over disappearance of 31 students

COLOMBO (AFP) — A Sri Lankan court Wednesday handed down 10 year jail terms to six soldiers and a school principal for abducting 31 teenage students who disappeared nine years ago, court officials said.

The trial which attracted attention from international human rights groups lasted three years.

High Court judge Chandrasekera Nanayakkara, while sentencing the guilty, criticised both investigators

and lawyers for mishandling the case.

An army brigadier who was implicated in the case was set free following lack of evidence and the judge criticised the police Criminal Investigations Department (CID) for trying to protect unnamed people.

The case was heard at the southern town of Ramapura, 100 kilometres south-east of here, following the disappearance of 31 students from the southern town of Embilipitiya in

1990. The victims, all 15-year-old boys from the Central College at Embilipitiya, were presumed killed when the army detention centre where they were being held was suddenly shut down in 1990.

The children were among 48 seized by the army during a crack down against anti-government Sinhalese People's Liberation Front or the JVP but they had nothing to do with politics or the rebels, relatives said.

The popular belief is that the military was led by the Central College principal to believe that the students were JVP activists because they teased his son about his love affair with another student. The principal was also given a 10-year sentence by the High Court Wednesday.

International human rights organisations have singled out the case to demand prosecution and punishment of those responsible for the killings.

**AU NOM DU GROUPE
SUEZ LYONNAISE DES EAUX
LE DIRECTEUR REGIONAL DU
DEVELOPPEMENT
MOYEN ORIENT/AFRIQUE DU NORD
FAIT PART
A SA MAJESTE LE ROI ABDULLAH
A LA FAMILLE ROYALE HACHEMITE
ET AU PEUPLE JORDANIEN
DE LA GRANDE EMOTION EPROUEE PAR
CELLE-CI A L'ANNONCE DE LA
DISPARITION DE SA MAJESTE LE ROI
HUSSEIN BIN TALAL ET LA PROFONDE
TRISTESSE QU'ELLE A RESSENTIE
DEVANT LE DECES D'UN SOUVERAIN
ILLUSTRE POUR SON COURAGE, SA
CLAIRVOYANCE, ET SA PERSEVERANCE.**

PAIX A SON AME

**مجموعة سويس ليونيز دي زو
ممثلة بالمدير الاقليمي للشرق الاوسط
وشمال افريقيا تتقدم من
جلالة الملك عبدالله بن الحسين المعظم
والعائلة الهاشمية والشعب الاردني
بأحر التعازي وعميق مشاعر الحزن والاسى
لفقدان جلالة المغفور له
الملك الحسين بن طلال
سائلين العلي القدير له الجنة
إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون**

and testament to the great
process is assured.

Letters of condolence

WITH GREAT sorrow I extend my deepest and sincere condolences to His Majesty King Abdullah and the whole Royal Hashemite family. King Hussein will never be forgotten, his name will forever be inscribed in our hearts and minds with letters of light. May God rest his soul.

Hana Ismail A. Rahman and family
Amman

WE SHARE the pain and sadness over the loss of His Majesty King Hussein with the Hashemite family, the Jordanian family and the whole world

Dr. Usama J. Abdelhadi & family
23 Elterwater Ave
Nepean, Ont.
Canada

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" 2 Corinthians 2:16

YOUR MAJESTY Queen Noor, The Royal Family, and The Dear People of Jordan,

It is with heartfelt sorrow for your loss that I greet you. It has been my prayer (and will continue to be my prayer) for all of you that God will fill the void in your hearts. May peace and joy and the assurance that His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal rests in the bosom of God and is whole and complete and as vibrant as he ever was. In my heart I feel that His Majesty knew God like no other man. It was evident in his life, commitment to his family and countrymen as well as in his speeches to the world, that he consulted God in all that he did.

I lost my mother to cancer when she was but 52 years of age. I felt such loss, abandonment, and great anger. But through that difficult time God became even more real to me. He Himself wrapped His arms around me and comforted me like no one else could. My husband was much support as were my children, but God the Almighty met my needs best because He knows my every need, thought, desire and feeling. The Holy Spirit helped me express to God just what I was feeling and needed for which I am grateful. It has been 7 years since my mother went on to be with the Lord God Almighty and my heart feels some loneliness at times, but for the most part I have much peace and assurance that she is with our Creator.

It is with great honour that I lift up my prayers on behalf of the entire Hashemite Family and the people of Jordan. I pray that His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Hussein will grow in stature as his father and his grandfather. I also pray for the wisdom of Solomon that he may rule with much wisdom, compassion, loyalty, and trust. Most certainly you and the entire Jordanian family have our support, trust, love and prayers.

May God grant you the desires and needs of your hearts!

Tammy L. Summey
Southern Baptist Representative
Jordan

I WOULD like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the people of Jordan, and of the world, on the death of King Hussein, a great leader and a great man.

When a guest in your country in September, 1997, I quickly realised the immense respect and love its peoples held for King Hussein. When I returned to Australia I tried to learn as much as I could about this remarkable human being. He has been a peacemaker, a statesman and a noble example to other heads of state worldwide.

Please add my name to those who have paid tribute to a King who truly deserve the title. I wish his family and his nation comfort in their mourning.

Patricia E. Slater (Mrs)
P.O. Box 32
Kenmore
Queensland
Australia

AS A former employee of the Jordan Times, I wish to convey my most sincere and deeply felt condolences upon the death of His Majesty King Hussein, whose bright star of hope will now forever shine upon his people, Jordan, and all those whose yearn for peace, prosperity, and human rights the world over.

I would also like to wish His Majesty King Abdullah all the wisdom and bravery that his father had.

Jean Pierre Ady Fenyo
Budapest

FIRST AND foremost I would like to extend my condolences to all the Jordanian people. I cried the whole day while watching the funeral live. As a Muslim I believe he was my brother, father and King. I would like to wish His Majesty King Abdullah all the best in future. All the British people are with him.

Fatma
U.K.

I WOULD like to send my heartfelt condolences to the Royal Family and the people of Jordan, on the loss of His Majesty King Hussein. May he rest in Peace. He was a truly great, compassionate and courageous man. The World will be a much poorer place without him. I share in your sadness and grief. May Allah bless you.

Pamela H du Boulay
Beguildy, Knighton, Powys
U.K.

MY HEART and prayers go out to Queen Noor and the family of the late King Hussein. The world has suffered a great loss.

I know that His Majesty King Abdullah will be a living tribute and testament to the great ruler his father was. His success is assured.

Melissa Goodwin
Mt. Dora, Florida
U.S.

LET ME extend my condolences and deepest sympathies to Her Majesty Queen Noor, His Majesty King Abdullah and the entire Royal Hashemite Family on the passing away of our great King His Majesty King Hussein Beo Talal.

His Majesty was a great man and always considered the well-being of Jordan and the people of Jordan, whom he always referred to as the great Jordanian family.

Your Majesty, you will always be in our thoughts and hearts, and your legacy lives on. May you rest in peace Your Majesty, and God grant us the peace you believed in and sought for.

Mohammad Jalal
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
U.S.

THIS WAS not the Amman I knew. It was grey and sad, it was not the clear, warm place I went to several times. I felt so close to the generosity, hospitality, sense of friendship and of peace of the people of Jordan, so well represented by their King. I was so sad, as if a part of this world was disappearing, for the King had still so much to do, for I felt he left us too soon, leaving his mission unfinished. Yet, his achievements are already beyond one man's life, and this was what made King Hussein so strong and impressive. I am convinced this influence is felt beyond the land of Jordan in the world. In some way, the King is here, somewhere, with us. Today, I am with Jordan

V. Depaigne
Brussels
Belgium

THE DIGNITY of Jordan as it faces a change from one distinguished (if challenging) era to another, under the leadership of a new and vigorous King, is superb. The whole world watched as the people and Jordan's leadership demonstrated their ability to live up to the hopes of leaders worldwide, as Jordan continues its remarkable leadership in the Middle East. All the key leaders of the world assembled, elbow-to-elbow, to pay just tribute to a fallen leader. I am confident that Jordan will justify the trust of the world that peace in the Middle East remains in good hands. The grief of the world on the passing of your former King is very real and intense. For decades, your former King put a human face on the Arab struggles for peace and justice. May your new King truly continue on his father's path.

Dave McLallen
mclallen@pell.net
U.S.

TO HIS Majesty King Abdullah, Her Majesty Queen Noor, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hamzah, and the remaining members of the esteemed Royal Hashemite Family, may God protect you all

I write on behalf of Noor Alkhas, Yara Gharaybeh, Muna Al Mufti and Omar Bustani, Jordanian students here at the University of Leeds in England. We would like to express our deepest condolences and our heartfelt sadness over the death of our beloved leader, King Hussein. Here, we feel, as do all Jordanians, that on this grievous day, we have lost not only one of the greatest statesmen and leaders the world has witnessed, but a father, a mentor, an inspiration and a light which led us through times of darkness. In his last interview, His Majesty, God bless his soul, said that he would like to be remembered as being "of the people and for the people," and indeed, this is the memory our departed King has imprinted in our hearts and minds, a memory that will remain with us till the day we pass into the hands of God. It is truly with the utmost sorrow that we bid farewell to this great man, the greatest of men, The grief felt by Your Highnesses and by the Jordanian family as a whole, is of course shared by us here from afar, as we bewilderedly observe images of a sombre Amman. We may only hope and pray that God will help you and the whole of the Jordanian population through this time of hardship and bereavement. May God bless you and protect you all, and may our cherished leader King Hussein rest in peace by the side of God.

Karim Jarir Halazon,
Leeds University
England.

WE WERE asked by our father judge Fayed Halazon (90 years), who served as a judge of the Court of Appeal for over 10 years and served as attorney general and a judge in the various courts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan under the late King Hussein to convey his sincere condolences to the new King of Jordan His Majesty King Abdullah and HRH Crown Prince Hamzah.

Let this be a witness of the great accomplishment of the King Hussein, the founder of modern Jordan who followed the legacy of the Hashemite family in its national endeavour to modernise Jordan and create the world recognition that we now enjoy.

Eng. Raja, Dr. Jarir
Sary F. Halazon
Amman

I WOULD like to pay my respects and sincere condolences to His Majesty King Abdullah, the Royal family and the people of the Hashemite Kingdom for the loss of the father of the Jordanian nation.

It is a very sad day for me. I feel I lost a friend and a great leader. As you know, many Israelis were concerned and have sent their best wishes to His Majesty during his illness. We all loved him and admired his courage.

At the funeral of our beloved Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, President Bill Clinton said in his speech two words in Hebrew with a double meaning "Shalom Chaver" — good bye friend or may peace be upon your friend.

May God grant His Majesty King Abdullah long years of health and prosperity, and maintain his father's legacy and his efforts for peace.

Yossi Fischer,
Tel-Aviv
Israel

DAYS ARE passing by and you're not with us today... A sigh sounds like million sighs since you went away But what can we do... and what can we say... Words are helpless and tears seem the only way... So let us tell you if we may... Let us tell you about the emptiness... the loneliness that we'll feel from now on and every day... Let us tell you about the pain... but we — believe me — won't complain 'cause you taught us how to care... 'cause we know how much you did care... We'll always be side by side... 'cause we know you're still there... So my King... May God have mercy upon you... and may God protect the love that we share...

A proud Jordanian woman
Austin, Texas

Luxembourg delegation

AS LUXEMBOURG was omitted in the list of attending countries printed ("Leaders at funeral") on page 12 of Tuesday's Jordan Times, we hope that Luxembourg's attendance can be recognised in the next issue of the Jordan Times, either in a brief notice, or perhaps by printing an amended list of countries in attendance.

Luxembourg delegation

Their Royal Highnesses the Grand-Duke Jean and the Grand-Duchess Josephine-Charlotte.

The Embassy of Belgium
Amman



IT WAS with considerable regret that I learned of the King's illness, and his journey home to die. He was, in my opinion one of the foremost men in all the world. His loss is a tragedy for his country, people, and family. I weep for all of them, and pray that he will live on in the hearts and memories of you all.

Paul Simmons
Grove City, PA
U.S.

KING HUSSEIN, even in death, brought enemies together. He was truly a great man of peace. May God be with the Royal family and the people of Jordan.

David Dickey, Tampa, Florida
U.S.

THE WORLD has lost a great King, a great leader and a great ambassador for freedom. I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the Royal family and the entire nation.

May God rest him in peace and comfort his family and his country. We lost a great man, a man that will certainly live in his son the new King, and also in our hearts for ever. King Hussein was an example that every nation should follow.

Someday in my life I hope to visit his grave. If I did not have the pleasure to shake his hand I can at least someday kneel down to pray for him by his grave side.

My own country of Cyprus and my new country in Canada I am sure will join the world in paying tribute to a great King.

On behalf of all my family I extend our deepest sympathy.

Myrianthi Chaudri
Canada

I WISH to tell the people of Jordan that I share their loss. I was fortunate to have trained many RJAF students on the F-16 aircraft here in the U.S. I made some good friends and I sensed their affection for King Hussein. Again, my deepest sympathy to all Jordanians.

Jay Irish
Fort Worth, Texas
U.S.

WE WOULD like to offer our deepest and heartfelt condolences to Her Majesty Queen Noor and the Royal family, over the death of our beloved father and great King. He was able to capture our hearts with his compassion, honesty and true devotion to his country and people. He was a man who, in a long and difficult quest, sought for peace and harmony not only for his Kingdom but for the entire world. We'll always remember him for his smile, his strength, his vision and leadership. We bid our farewell to not only the greatest King through the centuries but also a wonderful man who will always remain alive in our hearts.

We also extend our deepest sympathies to Prince Ali and Princess Haya because yesterday their sorrow for their father was deepened by the memory of their late mother.

Finally may God Almighty, give His Majesty King Abdullah the wisdom and strength to shoulder his new responsibility and carry on his father's legacy.

Yousef Abdul Hamid Nsour and family
Amman

OUR THOUGHTS and prayers are with you all during this very sad time. May you find peace and comfort in knowing how many lives were touched by your King. May his spirit live on through his son.

Susan Allen
Sparks, NV
U.S.

I SHARE with you and every Jordanian the loss of a great leader.

King Hussein was a true man of peace, and as such we shall always remember him. May his soul rest in peace

Eli Hacohen
Israel

A FRIEND — is one to whom one may pour out all the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together knowing that the gentlest of hands will take and sift it. Keep what is worth keeping and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away — Arabian Proverb

King Hussein was this kind of friend to his people and to the world. His fearless courage and desire for peace will long be remembered. My deepest condolences to Queen Noor, the Royal Family and the Jordanian people; my prayers to King Abdullah.

Dixie Herron
Shreveport, Louisiana

Yemen's oil income falls to \$453.8m

SANAA (RI — Yemen's income from oil exports reached \$453.8 million in 1998, sharply down from about \$1.1 billion a year earlier, oil ministry figures have showed.

The government's share of crude produced in Yemen from January to December stood at 69 million barrels of crude, the ministry said.

Local consumption for the same period stood at 29.9 million barrels and the government's share of exports was 39.1 million barrels.

Yemen is a small oil producer which pumps around 300,000 barrels of crude per day.

There are about 30 foreign energy companies in the country which hopes to attract greater foreign investment in its oil industry.

Yemen produces about 390,000 barrels per day of crude oil.

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The chief of Israel's manufacturer's association called Wednesday for Israel to invest \$280 million in Jordan.

"The economic stability of our Jordanian neighbours is as important in our view as stability in terms of security," said association head Dan Proper.

"The Israeli government, quietly and without a lot of publicity, should invest \$200 million to strengthen the dinar," Proper said on Israel radio.

He said private investors and companies should invest another \$80 million in industry, public works like road paving and high-tech companies operating in a joint industrial zone in the city of Irbid.

Officials said Iranians were stocking up on dollars for foreign trips during Iran's new year holiday in late March and for the upcoming Muslim Haj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

to the dollar from 7,200 riyals per dollar.

Central bank governor Mohsen Nourbakhsh said Monday the government would take strict measures to reduce demand for foreign currencies in a bid to shore up the rial.

These include even tighter control on the imports of goods, stricter customs procedures, and a curb on flights abroad ahead of the new year holidays.

Officials said the number of flights to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, a popular destination for Iranian tourists and traders, would be cut back to reduce demand for dollars.

Nourbakhsh said officials would also try to lower demand for hard currency by stopping state firms from turning to the black market to secure dollars for spare parts and raw materi-

The government, badly hit by a sharp fall in oil prices, has been unable to provide sufficient hard currency to state and private firms, prompting them to turn to the black market.

The government had come under pressure to stop the rial's crash, which has created uncertainty among traders and further pushed up prices of consumer goods.

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THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Vegetable dish
- 6 Luge
- 10 Himalayan monk
- 14 Subdivision of a people
- 15 Increase staff
- 16 Actor Sharif
- 17 Bancroft and Meigs
- 18 Send out
- 19 Low character
- 20 Ultimate coat
- 22 Ballet bend
- 23 Pinball goof
- 24 Double-check text
- 26 Security mission
- 30 Scandinavian capital
- 31 Hodgepodge
- 32 School official
- 35 G-sharp
- 36 Pollantroupiest
- 41 Segment of a circle

- 42 Family member
- 43 Take care of
- 44 Frooze element
- 46 Togo's capital
- 47 Ouessi-religious group
- 48 Ryan and Cara
- 51 Riveted
- 54 Mile queen, casually
- 55 Off-base GI
- 57 Car surface
- 63 Train track
- 64 Whopper
- 65 Juliet's beau
- 66 Gumbo veggie
- 67 Adam's grandson
- 68 Ultraviolet filter
- 69 Lascivious gander
- 70 Bears' lairs
- 71 Affirmatives

DOWN

- 1 Use a stiletto
- 2 Pize's river
- 3 Bellibutton collection?
- 4 Shelter a criminal, e.g.

By Dorothy B. Martin
Highland Park, Ill

- 5 Explorer Hernando
- 6 Outer covering
- 7 Self e maximum
- 8 Moran of "Happy Days"
- 9 Escargoes
- 10 Keep a — (be inconspicuous)
- 11 Soap substitute
- 12 "West Side Story" song
- 13 Packing a rod
- 21 Temperate
- 25 Veady
- 28 Whole groups
- 27 Hand-cream ingredient
- 26 Prong
- 29 Underground pit
- 30 Formerly
- 33 Bridge position
- 34 Knacker
- 36 Write Uri's
- 37 Peak
- 38 Golf-ball holders
- 40 Embarrassing loss

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- 45 Docking place
- 46 Propelled in a high arc
- 50 Whisky cocktail
- 51 Entertainer Channing
- 52 Get up!
- 53 Watered silk fabric
- 54 Intestine segment
- 55 Windowless apt
- 58 Country road
- 59 Slow flow
- 60 Old Testament book
- 61 M. Descartes
- 62 Accomplishes

This image is a composite of three comic strips. The top strip is from Peanuts, featuring Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy asks Charlie Brown to look at pictures of her mother, which she has put in an art museum. Charlie Brown looks at the pictures and says, "She's very pretty...". The middle strip is from Andy Capp, featuring Andy and his pet dog, Pet. Andy is talking to Pet about a can of beer, and Pet responds by saying, "Oh, all right then, but how am I going to give it up if you keep on badgering me?". The bottom strip is from Mutt'n'Jeff, featuring Mutt and Jeff. Mutt is talking to Jeff about a can of beer, and Jeff responds by saying, "Oh, all right then, but how am I going to give it up if you keep on badgering me?".

THE BETTER HALF.

By Glasbergen

GLASBERGEN

"I got my tongue pierced so I can eat lollipops in secret and my coworkers won't know I have candy to share."

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

TOODU

○ □ □ □ ○ □ □

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FETHY

○ □ □ □ ○ □ □

GUYSAR

○ □ □ □ ○ □ □

YECKAL

○ □ □ □ ○ □ □

Answer: NO

○ □ □ □ ○ □ □

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

AIR POLLUTION
DOES THIS.

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer: THICK GUILD OMELET VENDOR

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's

Jumbles: THICK GUILD OMELET VENDOR

Answer: What the nurse told me to do

Answer: What the nurse told me to do

FORECAST
By Linda Coyle

ARIES: March 21 to April 19: You've learned in the past that you're not very useful today. But you're picking up that you've got to stick to the previous way of doing it. It worked out for a while, but the job, put in the same line is how true is it?

Taurus: April 20 to May 20: You're worried about money. But the anxiety you're experiencing actually is getting in the way of the problems dissolve. It's only how this happens? Something about a thing makes it in place so we can't ever get it today. If you can possibly relax and your friend can find a way.

GEMINI: May 21 to June 21: More today could be dissatisfied. Make your partner not to do something important to have all the facts, but need to tell them all. Somebody once said that dissatisfied is the better part of valour today that's certainly true. Be free, and advise your partner the same.

CANCER: June 22 to July 22: Notice your job is no lunatic. Maybe that's because you're taking too much. There are no extra people to be gained for working your death. Do the things you're going to do today, that perfect person show up in the nick of time.

LEO: July 23 to August 22: Might be tempted to take a risk. There's a great opportunity there. One consequence you hadn't considered. Something that seems as all turn out to be scarce. So, if being on there being more you'll lose. If you bet the other you'll probably win, but that's even riskier position to take, get to wait.

VIRGO: August 23 to September 22: Beware of a deal today that's too good to be true. It is. The barrier in the way. Strangely enough this could refer to a clog in plumbing, or to your mate not something around the house he promised to take care of. If any of those transpires today, be a sport. No point in getting all upset.

LIBRA: September 23 to October 22: You've just about learned a lot of new skills to work on a hold project. This could be fun if you've got a partner with more experience. Don't

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Revenue collected at touristic and archaeological sites drop to JD6.7m

**** THE TOTAL** revenue collected from all archaeological sites during the first eleven months of 1998 amounted to JD6.69 million, 6.27 per cent less than the JD7.14 million collected during the same period of 1997. Sources at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said entrance fees to Petra accounted for 83.45 per cent of the total revenue from all touristic and archaeological sites.

The sources indicated that 317,317 persons visited Petra during the January-November period of last year, 11.53 per cent less than the 358,680 visitors during the same period of 1997. Jordanians accounted for 14.2 per cent of the total number of visitors to Petra.

Jerash and Madaba (Map Church) were visited by 215,499 and 117,760 tourists during the period covered, 8.46 and 15.07 per cent less than the numbers recorded during 1997 when 235,427 and 138,663 persons visited the two places. Jordanians represented 24.73 per cent of Jerash visitors. Um Qais was visited mostly by Jordanians who accounted for 71.18 per cent of the 133,071 persons that visited this

northern mountainous archaeological place. A total of 165,270 persons visited Um Qais during the first eleven months of 1997.

The castles of Ajloun and Karak were visited by 140,966 and 85,560 persons respectively compared to 132,530 and 95,122 tourists in 1997. The numbers for 1998 were less by 6.75 per cent and 10.05 per cent respectively although Jordanians represented 65.9 per cent of those who visited the Ajloun Castle and 17.1 per cent of those who visited the Karak Castle.

Tabaqet Fahl (Pella) and Wadi Rum were the two areas that received more tourists last year as the number rose from 38,800 persons in 1997 to 65,064 visitors and from 59,657 persons to 67,304 visitors respectively. The lowest number of tourists was recorded at Um Al Jimal which was visited by only 2,858 persons, 29.10 per cent less than the 4,031 figure registered in 1997.

The Amman Museum was visited by 37,850 tourists last year, 20.36 per cent less than the 47,525 persons who toured the museum in 1997 (Al Ra'i + Al Dustour).

Panel studying mechanism to include private sector in Disi water project

**** THE OVERALL** cost to draw water from Disi Basin to Amman was estimated to cost JD600 million by Thabet Al Wir, the vice president of the Zarqa Chamber of Industry. "This big project will create thousands of local employment opportunities," he said. Wir, a member of the higher committee formed to follow up the measures for setting up the "National Water Company" explained that the JD630 million estimate cost presented by the Ministry of Planning includes everything related to the project such as the cost of establishing the company and laying down the pipes. Earlier, a preliminary concept envisaged the cost of setting up the company at JD100 million.

The Zarqa industrialist indicated that the Ministry of Water and Irrigation will soon be floating the documents to qualify the companies that will be submitting offers for the project. Such a step will be in preparation to float a tender on those who meet the terms. Wir expected no less than five firms to move to the second stage of the process.

Wir concluded that a small panel was formed to study the mechanism of the participation of the private sector and to formulate a general concept about the relationship of the private sector with the foreign firm and the ties of both with the Ministry of Water and Irrigation (Al Aswaq).

Asian woes hurt U.S. tourist industry

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The economic turmoil in Asia was the main factor in a decline in the number of foreign tourists visiting the United States last year, the Commerce Department has said.

The report said figures from the third quarter of 1998 showed a 2.6 per cent decline in foreign visitors compared to the same period of 1997.

"Asia's economic situation continued to be the main factor for the overseas short-fall," said the report from the agency's International Trade Administration.

For the July-September quarter, the number of arrivals from Japan showed the sharpest decline — 11 per cent, with a 17 per cent decline in the month of September, due in part to a strike by Northwest Airlines.

"Despite these record declines, Japan still remains the top overseas market for the United States with 3.8 million arrivals through three quarters of 1998," the agency said.

"Asian arrivals to the United States continued double digit declines for the first three quarters of 1998. In all, arrivals from Asia through September 1998 were down nearly 14 per cent," it added.

Over the first nine months of 1998, the number of visitors from western Europe grew two per cent, while those from other regions were also higher: South America (four per cent), Central America (26 per cent), the Middle East (six per cent), eastern Europe (seven per cent) and Africa (12 per cent).

Bank of Israel to raise capital adequacy ratios

TEL AVIV (R) — The Bank of Israel said Tuesday it planned to raise capital adequacy requirements for Israeli banks to 9.0 per cent from 8.0 per cent but denied the measure signalled concerns about the health of the system.

Banking sources said the move was aimed principally at Bank Hapoalim, whose capital adequacy ratio fell to 8.4 per cent after the bank booked a special one billion shekel (\$245 million) dividend payout in third-quarter 1998.

Hapoalim, Israel's largest bank, was acquired from the Israeli government by an investor group led by Ted Arison in September 1997 in a leveraged buyout.

"There is the matter of privatisation. Some of the banks were acquired with loans and (the owners) want to repay them," said a central bank official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"There is a difference when a bank is owned by the state, which doesn't take out profits, and when it is controlled privately by owners

who do," he added.

The Bank of Israel denied in a statement that the measure, to be discussed at a Feb. 17 meeting of the bank supervision committee, signalled any concern about the stability of the Israeli banking system.

A Bank of Israel official said, however, that it was taken in light of the Asian financial crisis that showed the key role banking stability played in the overall economy.

"This is shutting the stable door before the horses bolt," said Ian McEwen, a London-based banking analyst at Lehman Brothers in London. A report issued by Hapoalim comparing financial ratios of Israel's top five banks at the end of third-quarter 1998 showed the ratio of capital to risk at Bank Leumi, the country's second largest bank, at 9.5 per cent.

Israel Discount Bank's stood at 8.2 per cent, United Mizrahi's at 8.3 per cent and First International Bank of Israel's at 11.0 per cent. McEwen said the practical

effect of the measure would be to spur Israeli banks to increase their tier two risk capital, as defined by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS).

Israeli institutions rely almost entirely on tier one, or equity, capital to cover their capital ratios. Tier two is debt capital.

McEwen said Hapoalim was still financially strong even after the dividend payout but said the Bank of Israel aimed to discourage any further payouts.

"This is a signal from the Bank of Israel, to Hapoalim in particular, telling them, 'You have surplus capital, but frankly you don't have so much, so no more one-off returns,'" he said.

Raising capital adequacy ratios is one of a series of moves aimed at tightening standards. Last year, the central bank adjusted the official calculation for risk-weighted assets and sometime this year it will likely revise regulations to conform with new BIS rules on capital coverage for market risk.

Asian car market seen bottoming out in 1999

SINGAPORE (AFP) — German carmaker Bayerische Motoren Werke AG (BMW) expects the Asian car market to bottom out this year after a 20 per cent annual fall in 1998 to 5.28 million units, company officials have said.

In the luxury car market where BMW competes, the fall was an even more severe 30 per cent from 1997 — which was a record year for BMW in the region — as the recession in Japan, South East Asia and South Korea hit rich Asians.

BMW Group sales in Asia dropped 28 per cent to about 70,000 vehicles last year from

the record high of close to 100,000 units in 1997. BMW also owns the Rover brand and last year bought the high-end carmaker Rolls Royce.

Deliveries of BMW-brand cars in Asia fell to 49,500 units in 1998, down 22.3 per cent, but its share of the luxury market rose by two points to 27 per cent, thanks in part to new models in the entry-level BMW 3 series.

Land Rover vehicle sales dropped 44.5 per cent to 5,303 units, while Rover car sales fell 36.8 per cent to 15,168. Both brands, based in Britain, were "affected by an overvalued

pound," a company statement said.

Luder Paysen, BMW AG's director of overseas sales, said the company remains committed to Asia and will press ahead with the construction this year of an assembly plant in eastern Thailand, its first in the region.

"I cannot think of a stronger commitment for our presence in Asia," he said in a statement, adding that BMW group sales losses in Asia were outweighed by gains in Europe and North America.

BMW will also open 36 new or upgraded group facilities in Asia this year and launch four new products in the region — the BMW 3 series coupe, the 3 series touring edition, the Land Rover Discovery and the Rover 75, which will be the standard bearer of the brand.

"BMW's development in Asia was based on our long-term commitment to the Asian region. As promised last year, BMW neither scaled down its operations in Asia nor did we hold back with planned projects," Paysen said.

Half of U.S. households had a personal computer in '98 — study

SAN JOSE, California (AFP) — Fifty per cent of U.S. households had a personal computer last year, a technology market research group reported Tuesday.

In 1995, according to a study by Dataquest, just 27 per cent of U.S. homes were equipped with a personal computer (PC).

"The PC penetration rate

continues to increase at a healthy clip, showing that the PC is rapidly becoming a standard household appliance," said Van Baker, director for Dataquest's consumer market research.

"There is evidence that the first-time buyers are coming from households in the lower socio-economic levels, however, the

increase in penetration is across all segments," he added.

In 1998 the home market for personal computers increased seven per cent over 1997, when 43 per cent of U.S. households had a PC. In 1996, home market penetration for personal computers was 36 per cent.

Central London tops EU wealth league

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) — Central London is the European Union's (EU's) richest region, topping an EU league table which has Greece's Epirus at the bottom.

On a national level, the report from the EU's statistics office, Eurostat, confirmed Luxembourg, Denmark and Austria as the EU's three per capita wealthiest nations. Spain, Portugal and Greece are the poorest.

Central London has more than double the EU average income and edged out two German regions, Hamburg and Darmstadt, for the top regional honours. Brussels was fourth and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg fifth.

Aside from Epirus, which borders Albania, the poorest regions were the Portuguese Atlantic Ocean archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, Greece's Northern Aegean islands and Extremadura in western Spain.

Inner London region enjoys a purchasing power per head of 38,529 euros (\$43,152) compared with the EU average of 17,377 euros (\$19,462). Purchasing power in Epirus given as just 7,538 euros (\$8,442).

The EU is currently gripped by a debate over the share-out of a development aid programme for poorer regions that will be worth up to 275 billion euros (\$308 billion) from 2000-2006.

EU leaders are scheduled to hold two special summits on the issue over the next few weeks.

The latest report showed 50 regions currently fall below 75 per cent of the EU average, the threshold for regions able to claim the highest levels of EU aid. The whole of Greece and seven of the eight Portuguese regions were below the 75 per cent level.

HOROSCOPES

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Something you learned in the past is going to be very useful today. If a situation comes up that you've seen before, go back to the previous time. Look at how it worked out then. If you did botch the job, put in the correction. This is how true learning occurs.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're worried about money again, and the anxiety you're experiencing may actually be getting in the way of having the problems dissolve. Isn't it funny how this happens? Sometimes worrying about a thing makes it stick in place so we can't ever get past it. Today, if you can possibly relax, you and your friend can find a way.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) A bold move today could be disastrous. Advise your partner not to do it. It's important to have all the facts, but you don't need to tell them all yet. Somebody once said that discretion was the better part of valour, and today that's certainly true. Be discreet, and advise your partner to do the same.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) If you notice your job is no fun anymore, maybe that's because you've taken on too much. There are no extra points to be gained for working yourself to death. Do the things you're good at, and delegate the rest to somebody else. Today, that perfect person could show up just in the nick of time.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You might be tempted to take a risk. There's a great opportunity there, but one consequence you hadn't considered: Something that seems abundant will turn out to be scarce. So, if you're betting on there being more of it, you'll lose. If you bet the other way, you'll probably win, but that's an even riskier position to take. Better just to wait.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Beware of a deal today that looks too good to be true. It is. There's a barrier in the way. Strangely enough, this could refer to a clog in your plumbing, or to your mate not doing something around the house he or she promised to take care of. If any of the above transpires today, be a good sport. No point in getting all worked up.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You've just about learned enough to put new skills to work on a household project. This could be fun, especially if you've got a partner with a little more experience. Don't think

you have to finish the whole thing today, however. Concentrate on the demolition phase now, and you can get into the reconstruct over the weekend.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Your losses today could be even greater than yesterday, so take care. Concentrate on bringing money in, rather than spending it. One thing you'll gain plenty of today is experience. You don't have to learn everything the hard way. Pay close attention to what's going on around you, and you can learn from other people's mistakes.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You could be wondering where you'll get the money to take the vacation you're planning. The conditions in effect right now are most likely keeping you stuck at home for a while. Instead of being frustrated, use this to your advantage. A home business could help you generate the cash you want.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Today, you're going to go through a bit of a cleanup phase. Get rid of whatever you don't need so tomorrow you can get new stuff. If its emotional baggage you're carrying around, just dump it. You'll be amazed to see how much fun life can be. At least try it for a half an hour, to see if you like it.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) Be careful today with your money. You could be surprised at how fast you wind up going through it. Once there was plenty of it, but soon enough there won't be enough. Be extremely careful with your check-book, and leave your credit cards at home.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Remember to be respectful today, even when you don't feel like it. It'll earn you points. If somebody else doesn't understand where you're coming from, don't let it bother you. What this person is missing is something that's pretty obvious to you, and to some of your friends. Be gentle when you point it out.

Birthstone of February:
Amethyst — Onyx

The Irish community in Jordan extend their sincerest condolences to the Royal family on the passing of His Majesty King Hussein May he rest in peace

Maria Khan, on behalf of the Pakistan Women's Association, offers sincere condolences to His Majesty King Abdullah, the Royal Hashemite Family and the people of Jordan on the passing of His Majesty King Hussein. May his soul rest in peace

The employees of Amoco Jordan extend to His Majesty King Abdullah, the Hashemite family and the Jordanian people their heartfelt condolences and sorrow at the loss of His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal May his soul rest in peace

YOU BELONG TO GOD AND YOU RETURN TO HIM THE GERMAN SPEAKING LADIES, GSL, in Jordan mourns with deepest sadness and grief, the loss of His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal The Great King of Wisdom and Peace and would like to extend to His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, The Hashemite family and Jordanian people Their Deepest Condolences and Sympathy May God Rest His Soul In Peace

Sixers stay unbeaten dealing Pistons first loss

PHILADELPHIA (R) — The Philadelphia Sixers overcame Grant Hill's 32 points and improved to 3-0 for the first time in 14 years with a 90-86 victory over the previously unbeaten Detroit Pistons on Tuesday.

Allen Iverson, shooting erratically this season, was only 6-of-20 from the field en route to 19 points and added just one assist but Philadelphia coach Larry Brown credited his all-around play for the team's great start.

"Allen has been playing defence as well as he has since I've been here," Brown said. "When he penetrates, he commands such attention, it allows us to get offensive boards. He's playing his man well and making good reads. His presence commands double-teams and makes everyone else better."

"He doesn't need to score 30 points for us to win."

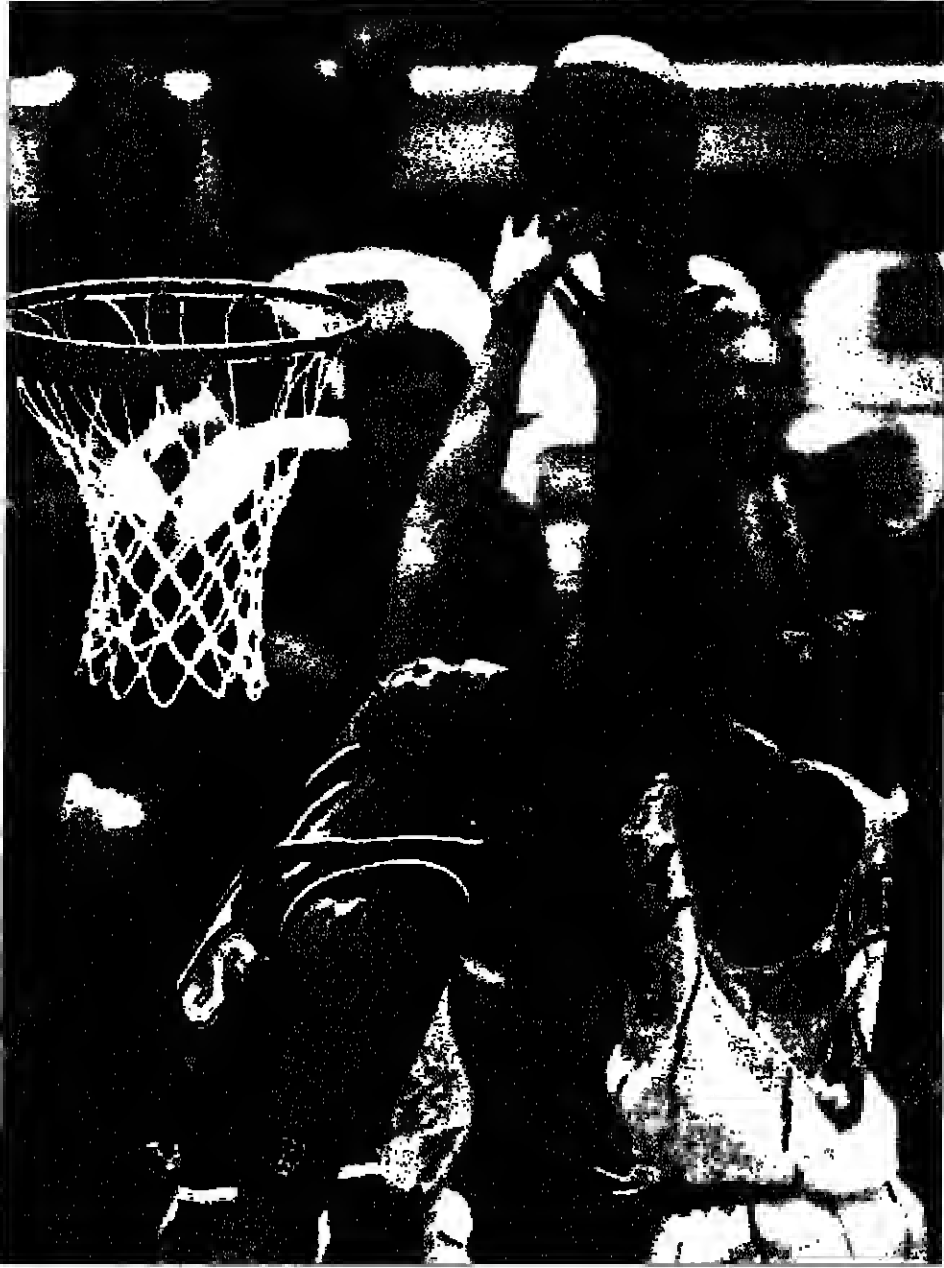
Iverson is shooting 27 per cent (15-of-55) for the season, but surprising Philadelphia keeps winning. The last time the Sixers started a season this well was 1984-85, when they won their first five games.

"I'm not frustrated at all," Iverson said. "I have another game coming up, as long as there is tomorrow, everything is all right with me. I can play 10 more bad games in a row as long as we win. I'm fine. I'm happy."

The Pistons, who had 13 shots blocked, surrendered a 13-5 run in the fourth quarter that turned a three-point lead into an 87-82 deficit with 1:22 remaining.

"Our only offence is a good defence," Brown said. "And yet we're winning because we have good defence and make the hustle plays."

Detroit tired near the end, playing for the third time in as many days. Atlanta and



Toronto Raptors Charles Oakley (R) tries to block Milwaukee Bucks Ray Allen from making a shot during first half NBA action on Tuesday. This was the Raptors home opener in the shortened basketball season. Milwaukee beat Toronto 91-77 (Reuters photo)

Miami are the other teams to play three straight days in this lockout-compressed season — and all have lost the third.

In Chicago, playing without Michael Jordan in a home opener for the first time since 1994, the Bulls were torched for 30 points

by Steve Smith as the Atlanta Hawks posted an 87-71 victory.

Toni Kukoc made just 6-of-21 from the field and finished with 16 points to lead Chicago.

In Dallas, Karl Malone scored 31 points and grabbed 12 rebounds as the

Utah Jazz got off to their first 3-0 start this decade with a 90-79 victory over the Mavericks.

The Jazz, who dropped three of their first four games last season, defeated their NBA finals nemesis, the Bulls, in their season opener on Friday and dealt

their Western Conference rivals, the Los Angeles Lakers, a 100-91 defeat on Sunday.

In Phoenix, Chris Webber had his second straight monster game with 28 points and 20 rebounds as the Sacramento Kings won in the valley of the Suns for the first time in over 11 years, 112-95.

The enigmatic Webber dominated again just two days after getting 25 points, 15 rebounds, eight assists and nine blocked shots in a win over Vancouver.

Rookie Jason Williams added 22 points for the Kings, who snapped a 24-game losing streak in Phoenix that dated back to January 1988.

Tom Gugliotta scored 26 points to lead Phoenix, which lost for the first time in three games. Coach Danny Ainge was ejected with 9:33 left in the fourth quarter for arguing a flagrant foul call against Gugliotta.

In Minneapolis, Stephon Marbury hit the go-ahead jumper with 43 seconds remaining and the Timberwolves avenged their only loss with a 74-70 victory over the San Antonio Spurs.

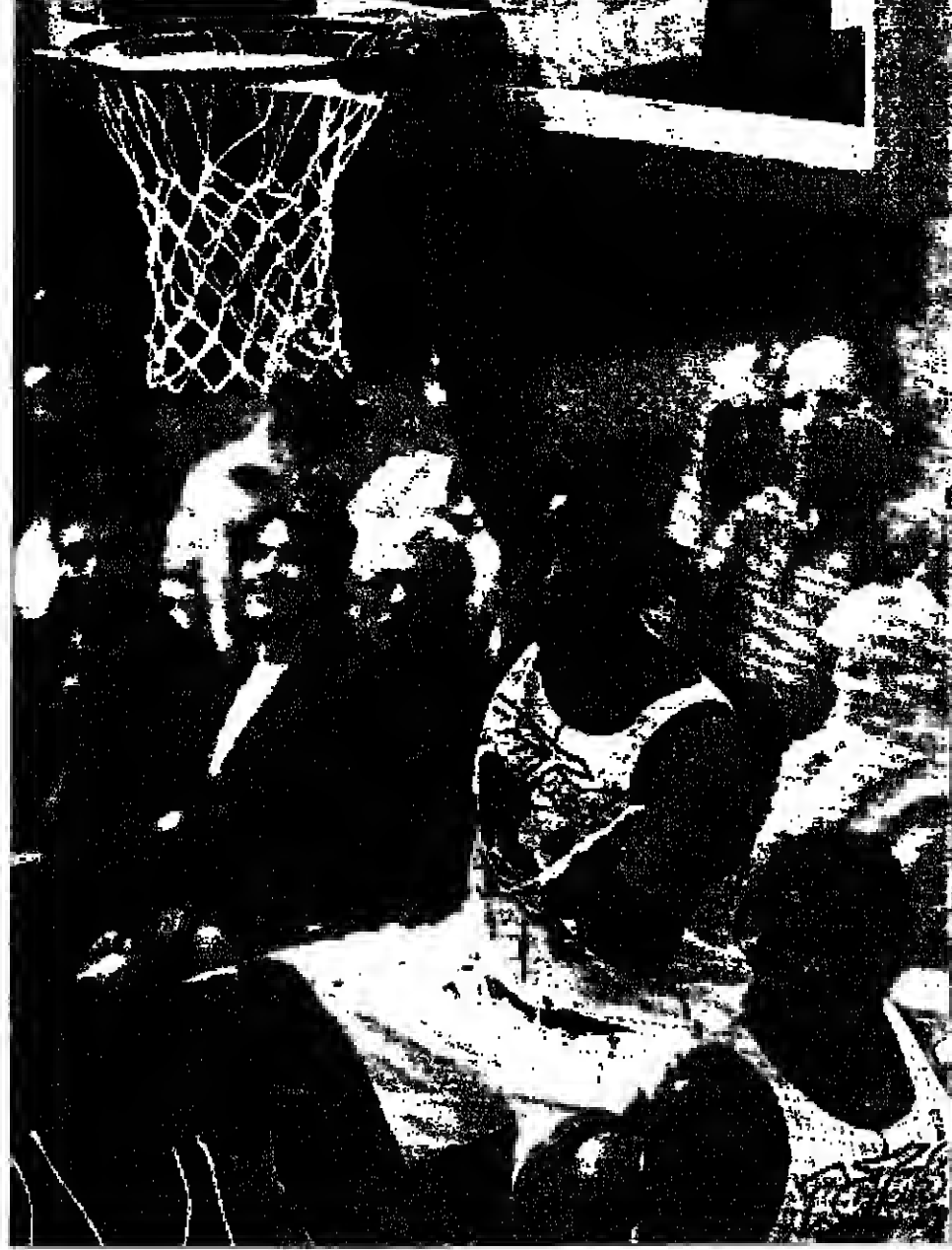
It was the Wolves' second win in three games and paid back the Spurs for Saturday's 96-82 beating.

Malik Sealy came off the bench to lead Minnesota with 16 points.

David Robinson netted 16 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to lead the Spurs, who have dropped consecutive games after winning their first two contests.

In Miami, Antoine Walker tallied 31 points and 10 rebounds and rookie Paul Pierce added 17 of his 19 points in the second half to lift the Boston Celtics to a 108-101 victory over the weary Heat.

Tim Hardaway scored 24 points and Terry Porter



Toronto Raptors John Wallace reacts to a call by the referee during first half NBA action against the Milwaukee Bucks on Tuesday. This game was the Raptors home opener in the shortened basketball season. On the left is Bucks Tyrone Hill and on the right Raptors Charles Oakley. Milwaukee beat Toronto 91-77 (Reuters photo)

added 21 for the Heat, who were playing for the third consecutive day.

In Seattle, Gary Payton netted 20 points in just three quarters as the SuperSonics scored a 90-71 wire-to-wire win over the Golden State Warriors.

Seattle, under new coach

Paul Westphal, is off to a 3-0 start for the first time since beginning the 1993-94 campaign with 10 straight victories. Golden State is 0-3.

In Toronto, Ray Allen scored 17 points and the Milwaukee Bucks used an 11-0 run midway through

the fourth quarter to spoil the Raptors' last game in Maple Leaf Gardens, 91-77.

The Raptors host the Washington Wizards at SkyDome in nine days, before moving into the Air Canada Centre on February 21.

U.S. coach still basking in glory of victory over Germany

NEW YORK (AP) — Very careful not to gloat, Bruce Arena still was basking in the glory Tuesday of his first victory as the U.S. national team coach — a 3-0 domination of three-time World Cup champion Germany.

"I thought we were going to play a good game," Arena said about Saturday's friendly in Jacksonville, Florida. "Certainly it's easy to say that in hindsight. But I thought we had a chance of getting a result."

"As you witnessed, we played extremely well. Some critics might say that Germany did not have their full team, but neither did we."

"That day we were pretty good."

The result rattled Germany's soccer establishment and opened eyes around the world, particularly considering the United

States' three-loss and leave performance at the World Cup, which included a 2-0 defeat to Germany.

Many pundits have lamented Germany's poor performance Saturday, but noting the U.S. domination of Bolivia in a 0-0 draw in another friendly on Jan. 24, Arena says Saturday's victory was due more to the Americans' good play than the Germans' lack of form.

"A lot of it was due to our team," Arena said. "The Germans came in fully prepared, trained accordingly and tried to win. We played well; they certainly didn't play well."

"In Bolivia, we were equally as dominant, just not as lucky."

"Maybe the signs are there, maybe we have the potential to be a really good team."

Arena seemed more happy

about the victory slowing derision of the United States as a soccer nation, particularly following the disastrous World Cup.

"It says a lot, it says we're more competitive than we were 10 years ago, 20 years ago," Arena said. "Does it say we've arrived, no. But we're making progress. That's important."

"For some reason, there was this bad reading out of the World Cup that U.S. soccer had hit bottom again. But that's not the case. We're one of eight-to-10 countries that's been in last three consecutive World Cups."

"Our young players are getting better, some are just getting their first or second caps. But it was not totally surprising."

While much has been made of the fact that all three goals were scored by

German-based players, Arena was quick to defend Major League Soccer, pointing out that Tony Sanneh, who scored the second of the three goals in a 10-minute span during the first half, only transferred from D.C. United to Hertha Berlin in the last month.

"Of what we had on the field, nine players play in MLS, so you can make own judgements," Arena said. "MLS is a good league, it's not the best league. I won't say it's one of the best five or one of the best 10. But we've demonstrated in short time that we can produce teams that can play with best teams in world."

"Eddie Pope is an MLS product; Chris Armas is an MLS product. We've a long way to go, but I don't accept that the league is no good and therefore the national team is no good."

Nike splits with Italian federation in cost-cutting move

BEAVERTON, Oregon (AP) — Nike has parted ways with the Italian soccer federation (FIGC), the company announced.

In a meeting with financial analysts, Nike officials informed the FIGC Tuesday that it will no longer sponsor the Italian national teams, a deal that was costing Nike \$15 million a year.

While losing the sponsorship of a powerhouse team such as Italy would have been unthinkable for Nike in past years, the announcement drew praise

from Wall Street analysts, who say the move is evidence Nike is serious about cutting costs.

Tom Clarke, Nike president and chief operating officer, told analysts that the Beaverton company will return to sales growth in its 2000 fiscal year, which begins June 1.

"We're poised to have steady improvement," Clarke said. He did warn, however, that the turnaround will be slow and steady.

"I think we have to be clear: We're not going to explode

into revenue growth."

Ongoing fiscal discipline is key, executives said. Forgoing a continuing relationship with the Italian federation, seen as a jewel of the company's soccer sports marketing programme, is proof of that, said Ian Todd, Nike's vice president for sports marketing.

"This is definitely a new Nike," analyst Dana Cohen said.

Nike has cut its selling, general and administrative costs from \$2.8 billion in its 1998 fiscal year to \$2.4 billion in 1999.

The cuts included eliminating staff and moving headquarters of Nike's Asia-Pacific main office from Hong Kong to Beaverton for a savings of \$150 million. The company could trim another \$50 million through a new procurement system that reduces the number of Nike's suppliers.

Nike has also cut back on filling new positions and taken to paying lower fees for athlete endorsements.

Sampras not rusty in first match of year

SAN JOSE, California (R) — In his first match back on tour after the longest layoff of his career, world number one Pete Sampras routinely dispatched Spaniard Galo Blanco 6-4 6-4 on Tuesday to move into the second round of the \$325,000 Sybase Open.

"I felt my tennis was going to be a little bit up and down tonight but it's like riding a bike, you don't forget how to do it," said the 27-year-old Sampras, a two-time champion in San Jose.

"But I've been training and practising pretty hard and I played real solid."

Third seed Mark Philippoussis of Australia barely survived his first-round tussle with Armenia's Sargis Sargsian, prevailing 6-7 (2-7) 7-5 6-3. Philippoussis could meet Sampras in the semifinals.

Sampras, who had not played since the ATP Championships last November, showed little rust in countering the Spaniard's heavy topspin ground attack, frequently chipping and charging and dominating his own service games. He won 97 per cent of his first-serve points.

"If there's one shot that I don't lose over a long span of time it's my serve and I relied on it tonight," said Sampras, who faced no break points in the match and delivered 11

aces.

"As the match went on I started to feel the ball pretty good and hit groundies pretty clean. I was a little surprised because I thought I might struggle a little bit, so it was a good start."

During his layoff, the 11-time Grand Slam champion put down his racket for a month and travelled to Hawaii on his first vacation in 10 years.

"For what I accomplished last year, I felt like I deserved to take a break, not just for my tennis but for my life," said Sampras, who spent most of last fall playing in Europe in order to break Jimmy Connors' all-time record of five years as the year-end number one.

The plans of former number one Jim Courier to reenter the top 50 in San Jose hit a roadblock when he was upended by Dutchman John Van Lottum on Tuesday 6-4 7-6 (7-4).

Now ranked 68th, the American still thinks he has an outside shot of reaching the top again, but realises that at age 28 it may only be a pipe dream.

"That's not what I'm playing for and I realise it would be close to a miracle for it to happen again, but I'm not going to rule it out altogether," Courier said.

Van Lottum reached the



Pete Sampras (file photo)

semifinals here last year but spent the latter part of 1998 battling an ankle injury. He said that despite Courier's low ranking, notching a win over a four-time Grand Slam champion is still huge.

"On a day when he plays well, he can still beat a lot of good players," said Van Lottum, who added that the game has changed since Courier bullied the tour as its top dog in 1992.

"You cannot win just hitting as hard as you can from the back. You need to be able to mix it up, play some serve and volley."

Van Lottum exploited Courier's weaker backhand side and took over the net in key situations.

"Jim plays the same rhythm so if you know how to control his rhythm, give him some slice and high balls, he has difficulty," Van Lottum said.



Norway's Kjetil Andre Aamodt sticks his tongue out as he poses with teammate Lasse Kjus (L) and Switzerland's Paul Accola (R) after winning the gold medal in the men's combined event at the World Alpine Skiing Championships on Tuesday. Aamodt won his second gold medal of the championship with a gold in the Men's Super-G (Reuters photo)

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) has announced that it will not seek to secure the rights to the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia, but will instead focus on the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece.

The USOC's decision comes after a lengthy process of evaluating potential bids for the 2000 Games. The committee found that the Sydney bid was the most competitive, but it chose to pass up the opportunity to host the Games in 2000.

The USOC's focus on the 2004 Games is part of a long-term strategy to build the infrastructure and experience needed to host the Olympics. The committee believes that hosting the 2004 Games will provide the USOC with the necessary resources to successfully bid for and host the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China.

The USOC's decision has been met with mixed reactions. Some critics argue that the USOC is missing a golden opportunity to showcase American sports and culture on the world stage. Others believe that the USOC's focus on the 2004 Games is a wise move, as it allows the committee to concentrate its efforts on a single bid.

The USOC's decision also has implications for the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) is still the favorite to win the bid, but the USOC's decision to pass up the opportunity could lead to a more competitive bidding process.

The USOC's decision is a significant one, as it marks a departure from the committee's previous strategy of bidding for the Olympics every four years. The committee's new strategy is a bold move, and it will be interesting to see how it plays out in the long run.

TEHRAN (AP) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami has announced that the government will commit to a series of reforms aimed at improving the lives of the Iranian people.

Khatami's reforms include a focus on economic development, social justice, and human rights. The president has pledged to create a more open and transparent government, and to encourage the participation of citizens in the political process.

The reforms also include a commitment to improve the education system, and to provide better healthcare services to the population. Khatami has also pledged to improve the environment, and to promote sustainable development.

The Iranian government's commitment to reform is a significant step towards creating a more modern and democratic society. It is hoped that these reforms will lead to a more prosperous and stable Iran, and to a better quality of life for its citizens.

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. boxer Mike Tyson, sentenced last week to a year in prison for punching and kicking an automobile driver, could possibly save his career by going to jail.

Tyson's lawyers said they had not yet decided whether to appeal the ruling against the former heavyweight boxing champion because doing so might not be in his best interest.

Tyson's case has attracted significant media attention, and his potential imprisonment has raised questions about the justice system's treatment of athletes. Tyson's lawyers are currently working to negotiate a plea deal that would allow him to serve his sentence in a more controlled environment, such as a psychiatric hospital.

The case highlights the challenges faced by athletes who are involved in legal trouble. It also raises questions about the role of the sports industry in supporting and protecting its athletes. The outcome of Tyson's case will have significant implications for the future of sports and the law.

Olympic ethics panel finds improper payments

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — An ethics panel implicated 10 more members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in a report that detailed the extreme means Salt Lake City used to land votes for the 2002 Winter Games.

The 10 IOC members were not previously tied to Salt Lake's excesses. That brings the number of those implicated in vote-buying schemes to 24 — roughly one-fifth of the IOC's total membership. Nine IOC members have been expelled or have resigned in the scandal.

And, for the first time, the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) was tied to the corruption scandal. The panel reported that a series of exchanges among three senior staffers involved "promises... made to secure votes."

In yet another setback for Olympic leaders, a major sponsor, John Hancock Insurance, said it was cancelling negotiations with NBC for \$20 million in advertisements. The company said it was protesting the IOC's failure to deal with the growing scandal.

Free trips to the Super Bowl, stays in ritzy Paris hotels, ski vacations and fistfuls of cash were among improper perks and payments cited in the 300-page report by an independent ethics panel for the Salt Lake Organising Committee.

It blamed two men for the pandering: Tom Welch, president of the Salt Lake bid committee, and David Johnson, his vice president. Welch and Johnson have denied wrongdoing.

Members of the bid board were not told of direct cash payments or details of bogus scholarships, and outside auditors failed to raise red flags about those expenditures, said David Jordan, a former U.S. attorney on the five-member

ethics panel.

The ethics panel did not total the amounts, but the improper payments — some in the form of scholarships — exceeded \$1 million. Another \$1 million in air fare, hotel rooms and shopping sprees were donated to the bid committee and passed along to IOC members.

According to the report, Welch even made a wire transfer from his children's trust account when the wife of Siuli Paul Wallwork, the IOC member from Western Samoa, sought \$30,000 for a friend in a serious situation. Welch later said the money had been repaid.

Wallwork was among the 10 newly implicated IOC members, although Phillip Coles of Australia and Willi Kalschnitt of Guatemala appear to have benefited the most. The two men and their families made four vacation trips together to the United States, including a Super Bowl trip that cost the bid committee \$19,991.

Coles stepped down Wednesday from Sydney's organising committee board for the 2000 Summer Olympics, pending an IOC inquiry.

The others newly implicated were Maj. Gen. Henry Edmund Oluferi Adeboye, Nigeria; Ashwini Kumar, India; Shagdarjav Magvan, Mongolia; Anani Mathia, Togo; Rampaul Ruhee, Mauritius; Austin Sealy, Barbados; and Mohamed Zerguini, Algeria.

IOC executive board delegate Jacques Rogge, a member of the IOC's internal investigative panel, said he had not yet seen the report and could not comment in detail.

Rogge said the panel will review the report, but that a key issue will be to determine if members were guilty of actual ethical violations. The report cited the

USOC's involvement by detailing a November 1995 electronic-mail exchange among three USOC staff directors. It contained repeated references to an agreement to help train athletes from the Sudan at USOC facilities as part of Salt Lake's campaign.

"A lot of promises were made to secure votes," wrote Alfredo La Mont, who, at the time, was the USOC's director for international relations.

When Jim Page, the committee's deputy executive director for programmes, balked at picking up Salt Lake's portion of the training cost after the city had won the 2002 Games, Tom Wilkinson, then assistant executive director, said it had to be paid because "a deal is a deal and Sudan delivered."

"May need Sudan again in future," Wilkinson wrote. "Don't burn bridges."

That appeared to be a reference to the Sudanese IOC member, Gen. Zein Al Abidin Ahmed Abdel Gadir, one of the nine IOC delegates who have been expelled or resigned.

The USOC denied that it was part of any quid pro quo.

Meanwhile, David D'Alessandro, president of John Hancock, was bitterly critical of most of the IOC leadership, including president Juan Antonio Samaranch.

He said he had stopped talks with NBC to pressure the network — the single biggest revenue source for the IOC with a \$3.57 billion contract.

The ethics panel inquiry is just one of five investigations into Olympic misconduct. The others include probes by the IOC, USOC, Justice Department and Utah attorney general.

Germany, Colombia play 3-3 tie

MIAMI (AP) — Germany and Colombia played to a 3-3 tie in a friendly match on Tuesday afternoon.

Germany's Michael Preetz and Colombia's Faustino Asprilla each scored two goals and had one assist in a wide open match before 14,565 spectators at the Orange Bowl.

Down 3-2 with 10 minutes remaining, Colombia tied the match on Ivan Cordoba's goal off a free kick from Asprilla.

Playing with a man advantage for the final 45 minutes after Colombia's Alexander Lemus was ejected with one minute remaining in the first half, Germany twice took one-goal leads, but Colombia overcame both deficits.

Germany, trying to rebound from a 3-0 loss to the United States Saturday in Jacksonville, appeared to have secured the match when Marco Bode's header on a centering pass from Preetz gave the Germans a 3-2 lead at the 74th minute.

Germany had an earlier one-goal lead on Preetz's header that beat Colombian goalkeeper Oscar Cordoba at the 55th minute.

But seven minutes later, Colombia tied the match at 2, when Asprilla converted on a penalty kick. Referee Brian Hall whistled substitute German goalkeeper



Colombia forward Faustino Asprilla (R) controls the ball as German defenders Christian Worms (L) follows in the first half of play on Tuesday at Miami's Orange Bowl stadium. The match ended in a 3-3 draw (Reuters photo)

Jens Lehman for fouling Colombia's Jorge Bernoudez inside the penalty area.

Colombia took a 1-0 lead in the 26th minute when four players combined on Asprilla's goal.

Arley Betancourt fed a charging Neider Morantes inside the German goal area

after a crossing pass from Henry Zambrano. Just as Morantes attracted multiple coverage deep in the left wing, he centered a pass to a wide open Asprilla, who easily beat goalkeeper Oliver Kahn.

Zambrano almost gave Colombia a second goal in

the 31st minute when his right foot blast from 18 yards was deflected by Kahn.

Just as Colombia seemed to dominate the action, Germany tied the match on Preetz's goal at the 33rd minute.

The goal was set when

Oliver Neuville took a long pass from Lothar Matthaus and blasted a shot deflected by goalkeeper Oscar Cordoba. Preetz took the deflection and drilled a shot in the lower right corner past goalkeeper Oscar Cordoba.

Earlier in the match, Preetz had a goal disallowed when he was whistled off-side at the 14th minute.

Lineups:
Colombia: Oscar Cordoba (gk); Ivan Cordoba; Foad Maziri; Jorge Bermudez (cpt.); Alexander Lemus; Mauricio Serna; Arely Betancourt (Leider Preciado, 46:00); Neider Morantes (Jorge Salcedo, 80:00); Jorge Bolanos (Mario Yepes, 46:00); Faustino Asprilla; Henry Zambrano (Edwin Congo, 60:00).

Germany: Oliver Kahn (gk); Jens Lehman, 46:00; Lothar Matthaus (cpt.); Markus Babel; Christian Worms; Marko Rehmer; Andreas Moller; Oliver Neuville (Alexander Zickler, 74:00); Jens Jeremies (Christian Nerlinger, 46:00); Marco Bode; Marco Reich (Lars Ricken, 78:00); Michael Preetz.

Matthaeus headed for MetroStars next year

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — German veteran and former national team captain Lothar Matthaeus could be heading to New York/New Jersey MetroStars when his contract with Bayern Munich expires next year, a German newspaper said Wednesday.

The mass-circulation Bild said Matthaeus had been offered a contract by the MetroStars coach, Bora Milutinovic.

"I've always dreamed of New York," Bild quoted Matthaeus as saying. "I can well imagine a transfer once my contract with Bayern expires in 2000." "If I haven't had enough by then, perhaps I'll play some more in the United States," he was quoted as saying.

Matthaeus, 37, was with Germany's national team in Florida, where the Germans lost 3-0 to the United States and drew 3-3 with Colombia on Tuesday.

The 37-year-old libero has been heavily criticised for his poor performances in both games.

A veteran of a record 132 games for Germany, Matthaeus led the nation to the 1990 World Cup triumph in Italy. He was recalled to the national team last year before the World Cup in France after injuries ruled out several other players.

New coach Erich Ribbeck has called Matthaeus a key element in his attempt to steer Germany successfully through the

ongoing European Championship qualifications.

But Matthaeus' failure to hold together Germany's leaky defense during the Florida trip raised questions in the German press whether time had finally caught up with the long-serving star.

However, Milutinovic was quoted by Bild as saying that he would take Matthaeus immediately.

Bild has been one of the strongest Matthaeus backers and led last year's media campaign to have him recalled to the national team.

Iran's reformist president underlines commitment to women's sports

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami inaugurated a vast new sports complex for women and children on Wednesday, as part of his reformist government's commitment to get women out of the home.

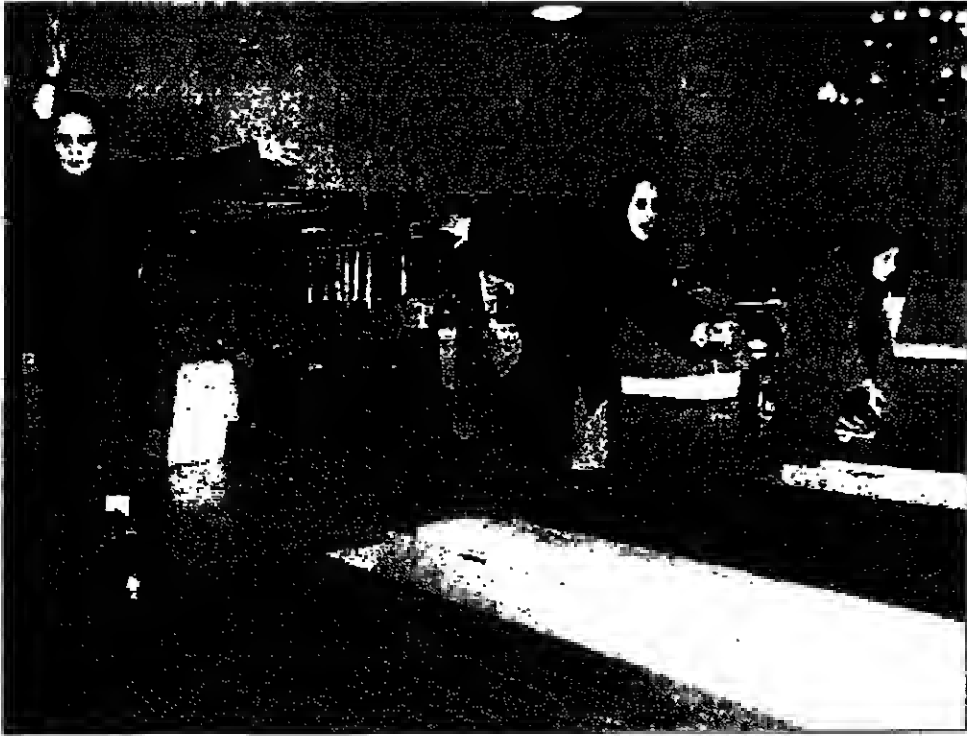
"Iranian society is more than ever in need of vitality," said Khatami, whose election victory in 1997 was mainly due to the votes of women and youngsters.

"Our requirements definitely outstrip our means but we must do something about it," he admitted as he inaugurated the 85,000 square-metre complex in one of Tehran's poorer districts.

The centre will allow women and children to take part in sports ranging from shooting, gymnastics and table tennis, to volleyball, basketball and swimming.

Iran's 20-year-old Islamic regime has restricted women's outdoor sports to activities that allow them to keep their hair and bodies fully covered in accordance with Islamic modesty rules.

But women seem to have



Iranian girls play bowling in Tehran, on Tuesday, as Iran continues to celebrate the Islamic revolution's 20th anniversary. The Islamic authorities have staged a carnival parade and a pop festival to help young people to identify with the 10 days of festivities (AFP photo)

gained greater confidence since Khatami's election.

Faezeh Hashemi, MP and daughter of Iran's former President Akbar Hashemi

Rafsanjani, has provoked

the ire of conservatives for encouraging women to take up cycling and football.

Hardline papers have

expressed concern that women playing football in shorts and tops will expose themselves to the illicit gaze of men.

NBA injury fears coming true

NEW YORK (AFP) — Fears of a rash of injuries with out-of-shape players and a hectic schedule of games have come true in the National Basketball Association (NBA) after only five days of a shortened season.

New York's Latrell Sprewell will miss three to six weeks with a stress fracture in his right heel while top rival Miami lost forward Voshon Leonard and guard Jamal Mashburn to serious leg injuries.

Sprewell's return to the NBA after chalking his coach and being suspended last season, was cut to only two games due to the injury.

"This is a microscopic fracture of the heel," said Norman Scott, the Knicks' team physician. "No surgery will be required. Latrell will wear a walking boot to provide stress relief. This will have no long-term effect on his future."

Sprewell, who will continue to bicycle and swim for fitness, started at small forward on one of the NBA's smallest lineups. He scored 24 points in the opener against Orlando but missed 10 of 12 shots Sunday in an 83-79 loss to Miami.

"I feel badly for Latrell, but the reality is we now have to get ready to face

Washington (Wednesday) without him," said Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy. "We expect Latrell's rehabilitation to go smoothly so he can get back into the lineup as soon as possible."

Sprewell averaged 14.5 points and 6.0 rebounds through the first two games.

"Obviously, I'm disappointed," Sprewell said. "I had every intention of playing tomorrow, but the injury was more than I thought. I will do everything I can to remain in the best shape possible while my heel improves so I can get back on the court as soon as possible."

A three-time All-Star with a history of trouble with teammates, coaches and management, Sprewell was suspended without pay for the final 68 games of the 1997-98 season for twice attacking Warriors coach P.J. Carlesimo during a practice on December 1, 1997.

Sprewell's suspension was the longest non-drug ban in league history. Initially, he was suspended for one year without pay by the NBA, with the Warriors terminating his contract, which had two-plus years and nearly \$25 million dollars remaining after being obtained from Golden State.

Sprewell filed grievances through the

union against the NBA and the Warriors. On March 4, 1998, an arbitrator reinstated Sprewell's contract and reduced his suspension by five months. The ban cost him \$6.4 million, but he has two years at \$17.3 million remaining on his contract.

Miami's Mashburn, 26, will be out at least two weeks. He is suffering from a severe bone bruise in his left knee and a quadriceps sprain.

The injured knee will be placed in a brace for a brief time and he will have to undergo rehabilitation before returning to the lineup.

Mashburn was off to a quick start for the Heat, with 42 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists in his first two games as Miami went 1-1.

The news for Leonard, 25, is much worse. The outside threat has a stress fracture in his left ulna and opted for surgery. He is expected to miss at least eight to 10 weeks, which could mean the season.

Leonard began the season on the injured list after entering training camp with ailment and was originally expected to miss three weeks. He attempted to play through the injury in the final preseason contest but was noticeably stiff.

Osaka spends \$19m to get Olympics

TOKYO (AP) — In its drive to host the 2008 Summer Olympics, Japan's second-largest city of Osaka has spent 2.2 billion yen (\$19 million) in five years, an Osaka city official said Wednesday.

In doing so, the city has already matched the total amount spent by the Olympic bid committee of Nagano, the host of the 1998 Winter Olympic Games.

The Osaka Olympic bid committee's bill includes 554

million yen (\$4.8 million) spent on planning and 1.7 billion yen (\$14 million) spent on public relations and social events. Osaka city hall official Yoshihiko Nishino said.

The committee has also bought gifts for officials of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The most expensive was a set of memorial stamps and wine glasses worth 53,000 yen (\$462) given to IOC President Antonio Samaranch. Nishino said.

Imprisonment might help U.S. boxer Mike Tyson save career

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. boxer Mike Tyson, sentenced last week to a year in prison for punching and kicking two automobile drivers, could possibly save his career by going to jail.

Tyson's lawyers Tuesday said they had not yet decided whether to appeal the ruling against the former heavyweight boxing champion because doing so might not be in his best inter-

ests. The reasoning is that Tyson, who is 32, might be able to resume training and even professional fighting sooner if he is imprisoned, according to local corrections services spokeswoman Claire Kirby.

His attorneys could appeal the sentence and try to have the fighter released on bond within 30 days, but that would risk conviction in a cir-

cuit court and a stiffer punishment if the off-troubled champion is found guilty.

With an Indiana judge ready to consider whether or not Tyson has violated probation from a 1992 rape conviction, the former champion could serve three to seven more years locked up, effectively ending his career.

Alternatively, Tyson's attorneys can try to work within the system, hope

Tyson is out of jail by September "on good behaviour" and try to fulfill terms of a \$33 million deal for staging four fights in Las Vegas.

According to Kirby, anyone sentenced to 12 months in prison in Montgomery County, Maryland — where Tyson was sentenced — may be transferred to a rehabilitation centre as soon as they are within six months of release.

Once there, detainees may be allowed to go to work outside prison in their chosen field.

"Mr. Tyson is a boxer, so we would work with him to continue in that profession," Kirby said.

In fact, she said, depending on Tyson's attitude and behaviour in coming weeks, he could be transferred to such a rehabilitation centre in as little as two to three weeks.

If he were to want to participate in a boxing match, he would need to petition a judge for permission to travel, for his "work."

Such authorisations have been granted before, she said.

Tyson also could be paid for such a fight, though 20 per cent of his earnings would go to corrections authorities as repayment for the expense of his room and

board in prison.

Tyson pleaded no contest to charges he kicked and punched two male motorists, ages 50 and 63, whose car rear-ended one being driven by his wife near here on August 31.

But it remains to be seen whether he will be allowed to keep his boxing licence, which he had recovered in October after 16 months of suspension for having bitten

the ear of his opponent Evander Holyfield during a boxing match.

The court in Indiana has yet to rule on the consequences of Tyson's latest conviction, which occurred while the heavyweight boxer was out of prison on probation "for good conduct" after serving three and a half years of a six-year sentence for rape.

